

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson, Author of "Lady Mary of the Dark House," "The Woman in Grey," "Queen Sweetheart," "Fortune's Sport," "The Barn Stormers," Etc.

CHAPTER VII. Told by Juliette de Nevers. Coward Conscience; and a Game of Bluff.

How I got through my part on that awful night I don't know. When I first went out on to the stage, to take up my cue at the end of the first act, my brain was a blank. I could not remember a single line that I had to say when I tried to project my mind ahead. I saw no one on the stage. I did not even see Maxine de Ribamont, though she seemed to feel him looking at me. I felt his great love coming down to my chilled heart like a warming ray of sunlight. I felt the influence of his desire for my success. For him I must not fail. I had never failed, and I would not now.

So it was, though I could not have repeated a word from my part before I went on the stage. I found myself answering cue after cue as I received them. Applause came surging up to my ears like a great tidal wave. The audience was mine to do with as I would; yet for once I feared it, as if it had been a great tiger tearing at it as it crowded to spring for I thought—"What if it knew the thing I had done? What if it should cry out that Juliette de Nevers had betrayed France and the ally of France—that she had stolen the treaty of alliance and sent it to the enemy—England! How those hands which beat themselves together now in applauding me would itch to grasp my throat."

Still, I went on. An actress can always go on—till she breaks. I think that she cannot be bent like other women, and I carry the women who are not skilled to hide things. It seems to me that they must suffer less. As I left the stage at last, having returned for five curtain calls at the end of the first act, I met next morning the room men carrying large harps and crowns and wreaths of flowers which had been thrown at me on the stage, or sent round from the stage door. I hardly looked at them, for I was waiting for my cue, waiting for me. He came from the box, and he followed me into the boudoir which adjoins my dressing-room. There we were alone. And I have five minutes to spare him before I need dress for the next act.

The touch of his hands gave me strength and life once more. There is something wonderful in the touch, in the pressure of his fingers, in the way one loves to be touched. For a moment one forgets everything else; the whole world falls away. I have flirted with many men—occasionally because it amused me; often because I suffered from ennui, and I was tired of my life; but I never knew what that blessed feeling was until I met Maxine de Ribamont.

He is so tall and strong—taller even than Noel Brent. And his eyes are the finest-looking man I had ever seen before I knew Maxine; and it was a heavenly rest to lay my head for a moment on his shoulder, just shutting my eyes, without speaking a word, and then—for I was so worn in body and soul with the strain of keeping up—that after death the best Paradise would be to lean my head on Maxine's shoulder, like this, for two or three hundred years.

For years I had been a political spy. But I owed a grudge to France and Russia, which I had promised my father to pay. And besides, it is difficult to deceive a country from which it is to deceive the man you adore. We women are true to individuals. For them we would all sacrifice a Cause; and never had I suffered such acute torture as I did at that moment when the shameful thought that Maxine de Ribamont—honorable, noble—cherished in me a traitor; that even if I did not overthrow her, she would overthrow me, and I could wash the stain from the heart he believed so pure.

What can be worse for a woman than the secret knowledge that to hold her lover's respect she must keep one black spot covered? Such a woman needs no future punishment. She has all—she deserves while on this earth. I realized it at that moment, and the realization choked me. I could not speak to Maxine. I could only shudder and sob in his arms.

He thought it was but my excitement in playing for the first time a heavy and trying part. He looked at me, even as I heard in his voice, that never had he shipped me as on this night. Since he had brought himself to accept the loan I had insisted upon making, to help him out of the difficulty in which he had been involved by the loss of the necklace, he had regarded me as the angel of his salvation. Now I had news for him to fill his heart with joy. He would love me more than before, and I would take as much love as my right, and hide the secret of my treachery as long as I could. But how long would it be? How could I tell that at this moment the theft of the treaty had not been discovered, and that the avalanche was not about to overwhelm us both?

The fear made me cling closer to Maxine, dreading that this might be our last embrace; that for the last time the love-light might be shining in his dark eyes for me. "You were glorious, my darling," he exclaimed. "I was so proud of you that I could hardly believe my own good fortune. To sit there in the box and see the whole house rise to you, applauding, shouting 'Bravo!' every man adoring your beauty and your genius, yet to know that you are mine; that no other man has

the right to hold you in his arms and kiss you like this—and this!" "Suppose that they all hated and kissed me?" I asked, drawing back a little and looking up at him. "Would you still love me then, or does it make me dearer to have a background of admiration?" "I would love you better, if there is a better," he answered. "You know I am a jealous brute. There'd be a fierce joy in facing a world that had turned against you."

"What is there that would make you love me less?" I asked, dwelling upon the subject with a kind of fearful fascination, such as I have found in hanging over the brink of a sheer precipice. "Nothing on God's earth—while you were true to me."

"And if I deceived you?" "Then I think I would kill you—and kill myself. But why speak of such things? I know—strange as it seems to you—how you do love me, or you would not have given so much to save me from ruin."

"I shivered; and I shall not be colder when they dress me for my coffin. I wished I had not looked over that precipice into the blackness beneath. Let me make the most of these five minutes which might be our last! I remembered the shock of joy which it was in my power to give him. But at that instant the clock in my dressing-room adjoining the boudoir struck with sharp, silvery notes. I had delayed too long to speak to the necklace. The five minutes had come to an end.

"I must go," I said. "It will not do for me to be late. But I have good news for you, Maxine—and a great surprise. I had just had another moment to spare you during the play, as I have almost to open each act; but when the curtain goes down on my death-scene, come behind again. I will see you here for a few minutes before I begin to dress to go home."

"For a few minutes?" he echoed. "But afterwards—what then? You promised that I might sup with you alone at your home."

My heart sprang to my throat at the words. Never before had I forgotten an engagement with Maxine. But this time I had forgotten. Desperate perplexity and nerve-killing excitement had driven the recollection from my mind. I could feel the blood rush up to my face, then ebb away again, and I knew that Maxine saw the change with surprise—for, unlike most actresses, I wear no make-up on the stage; I think I detest stunts, expression, and my complexion bears the glare of the footlights well.

"Had you forgotten?" inquired Maxine reproachfully. "I could not tell him that it would be impossible for me to keep my promise, so I temporized. 'We'll talk of it at the close of the play—after my death,' I said, trying to laugh; yet the words went ringing on in my own ears. I wished that I had not attempted so sorry a jest.

Maxine looked at me questioningly, but I put him from me, saying that he must go to his room, and I should have to keep the curtain down—a thing which I prided myself on never having done yet. He left me infinitely saddened, as if, unknown to himself, the shadow of my grief had fallen upon the first act. This was the end of the first act. As I was hurrying to my dressing-room after the second act the stage door keeper intercepted me with the reverential air which always hangs over any person who is necessary to him to address me. "Gracious mademoiselle, a letter, which I was urgently requested to put into your hands," he said.

I looked at the envelope, for I thought that Noel Brent might have had bad news, and written me; but I suffered something worse than disappointment as I saw the handwriting on the sealed envelope. It was from my enemy, Count Inanoff.

and sad, and my coward conscience gave me a quick stab of fear. "What is the matter?" I asked, while inside my head there was a shrieking question: "What if the news had come to him? What if already something had happened—the beginning of the end?"

I could have cried with the snapping of the tension when he answered: "It was only that terrible scene—your death, so Heloise, my dear one. It was so terribly real. It was all I could do to sit still in the box and bear it—I wanted to spring on the stage and save you from that ruin. I think I can never come to see you in this part again. You don't know what it is to touch you once more—warm and alive—your own beautiful self. You will let me go home with you, and stay for a little while, won't you, my queen?"

"How it broke my heart to send him from me!" "Don't think that I do not want you to be with me," I said. "I do want you—oh, more than you can guess. But I am so tired—I am almost dead. When I asked you to have supper with me, I did not realize how utterly worn out I was."

"My dearest!" he exclaimed. "Then I will not be so tired. You will go home and straight to bed. But you will let me drive you to the door?" "Even to that I must say no," I insisted, miserably, straining every nerve to be plausible, to convince him of my wisdom, and not to pain him too much. "You see, I did not mean to come to an end. I must go. It will not do for me to be late. But I have good news for you, Maxine—and a great surprise. I had just had another moment to spare you during the play, as I have almost to open each act; but when the curtain goes down on my death-scene, come behind again. I will see you here for a few minutes before I begin to dress to go home."

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low and devoted to me) to appear at the window. I was vexed, and I did not turn my eyes to the right or left as I walked from the stage door to the boudoir, which as I had expected, was in its place. It was not for me to look about for Inanoff; it was for him to be awaiting me, and so it fell out. As my goodwill opened the door for me, Inanoff stepped forward with a "Good evening, mademoiselle," softly, pronounced in his hated voice.

"I will stop for you at the corner of the Rue Boulangere; it would not do, for you must know, for me to take you in here," I whispered, hurriedly. He bowed acquiescence and moved back, that the groom might receive his instructions; and five minutes later he was sitting in the boudoir beside me, with Agnes seated opposite.

"Now," I began, abruptly, in Russian, cutting short his fulsome praises of my beauty, "what have you to say to me?" "I am very glad to see you," he said, the defensive, letting each decisive move be made by the adversary. "My maid speaks only in French."

"Why are you so cruelly harsh?" he exclaimed. "How have I ever offended you, save by loving you too well?" "You, though you have treated me as no man with self-respect should allow himself to be treated by a woman, I adore you still, and have risked humiliation in coming to see you, solely because I wish to be your friend; since you will not have me as your lover."

"I thank you as much as you deserve," I said, without attempting to conceal my bitterness. "And I should be still more grateful for your enlightenment. Pray do not beat about the bush, but tell me straight out your purpose in seeking this interview."

"I have sought it because I love you, and because I desire to warn you. Everything is known."

"I am at a loss to understand you," I replied, though I might have added that I knew well what he wished me to understand. "You speak in riddles."

"Must I put you to the test? Then—the loss of the document is known."

"What document?" I inquired, bent on forcing his hand. "If you must have it, the one you took from the Foreign Office on the day when the Comte de Ribamont gave you tea there."

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY OFFICERS ELECTED FOR ENSUING TERM

Secretary - Treasurer's Report Shows Satisfactory Progress During Past Year—Other Business.

Last evening at the St. Andrew's Presbyterian church the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society was held, there being a good attendance. The chair was occupied by Noah Shakespear, and after the reading of the minutes the report of Secretary-Treasurer A. Lee was called for and read as follows:

"The British and Foreign Bible Society, whose interest we have met tonight, is from some points of view the most remarkable institution in the world. It was founded 99 years ago, for multiplying copies of the Book of God. We are a society of the people known as the Bible Society is not only a vast and very efficient translating, printing, publishing and distributing society of the Word of God, but it is also a great missionary society. Its alliance with foreign missions was never more intimate. It has served as the great store house, from which all the British foreign missions draw their religious supplies. As a rule, however, the people known as the Bible Society are not only a vast and very efficient translating, printing, publishing and distributing society of the Word of God, but it is also a great missionary society. Its alliance with foreign missions was never more intimate. 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