

A Woman with a History.

By HURKARU.

CHAPTER I.

My tale commences a few years ago, shortly after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, when Calgary was beginning to emerge from a village, and was rapidly growing into a thriving town. The "Royal" was at that date the only hotel in the place; there were one or two taverns, but these could not lay claim to the dignified title of hotel, and even the "Royal" by Montrealers or Torontonians would be considered very third rate indeed. However such as it was, it was the best Calgary could boast, and one morning in August a man entered the dining room and seating himself at one of the tables called for breakfast. He was a splendidly built fellow six feet in height, and though dressed in an ordinary farmer's costume, there was an air about him which told plainly that he had not always been in that rank of life. The head well set on, was held erect in military fashion, and the handsome aquiline features with the heavy drooping mustache all betrayed the soldier.

I have named this tale "A Woman with a History," and I find at starting that my hero, Howard Clifton, has also a past belonging to him which is briefly as follows. He had once been in the Guards and had almost run through a large fortune by wilful and stupid extravagance. He was going downhill very fast, when suddenly, as he himself would have said, he put on the break, jammed it down, and pulled up in the middle of his headlong career. He left his regiment, and with the residue of his fortune came out to the Canadian North West, where after looking about for a few months, he bought a farm some few miles from Calgary and prepared to breed cattle.

As Clifton took his seat on the morning in question a large bull-dog coiled himself up under his chair, and dozed and slept alternately with the indolence of his breed. The animal was picturesque from his very ugliness, and as he lay with his great jaw resting on his fore paws, while his eyes blinked lazily now and again, he looked the image of quiescent strength, whose teeth, which the lips could not cover up, seemed to say "Noli me tangere." He was the only friend who had stuck to his master through every vicissitude, and indeed was difficult to shake off when once he had taken hold!

The waitress who brought Howard Clifton his breakfast might have passed unnoticed in a large city, but in Calgary she arrested your attention at once. It was not that she was wonderfully beautiful, for she was not, but her deep blue eyes (the best features of her face) had a melancholy, far away, expression, which could

not fail to rouse interest in any keen observer, while her manners and pronunciation at once attracted the ex-guardsman as being so totally different to what he had hitherto met in that rough region.

After watching her as she placed the various dishes he had ordered on the table, and noticing the nervous glance she bestowed all the time upon the dog beneath his chair, Howard remarked with a smile "You need not be afraid of Trust, he is perfectly well behaved I assure you Miss—"

Then he stopped not knowing what name to add.

"Thank you very much; I was a little bit alarmed Mr.—"

When she too stopped.

"My name is Clifton," said Howard promptly and in a tone as if he expected a similar confidence in return, but he was disappointed for the girl merely bowed and hastened off to some other guest.

Howard Clifton's curiosity was now fairly excited, and quickly finishing his meal he sought out the landlord and enquired what the latter knew about his new waitress.

"Very little," was the reply. "Her name is Jessie Graham and she has been with me about a week. I believe she came out here intending to find a situation as governess, and when her funds were exhausted she was glad enough to take the place you see her in. She suits pretty well, and that is about all I can tell you."

"Jessie Graham—governess"—mused Clifton as he strolled into the town to make some purchases. "How the deuce did she drift out here. Poor girl; poor girl."

It is a very trite and true saying that "pity's akin to love," and once let a young fellow of five and twenty begin to compassionate a blue-eyed damsel some few years his junior, it does not require any vast amount of wisdom to foretell the result. Howard Clifton had, what is called, gone the pace in the old country, and having discovered, after squandering some thirty thousand pounds, that "all is vanity," severed himself from society and coming out to his cattle ranch determined to live the rest of his days like a hermit. At first he had no difficulty in sticking to his resolution, for he met with no one whose intimacy or friendship he cared to cultivate, and the free life on his farm was a pleasant change after the dissipation of London. But Jessie Graham's sad eyes and refined bearing upset in an instant his calculations and he began to make excuses for frequent journeys to Calgary. He would linger over his meals at the Royal Hotel in order to make opportunities for conversing with her, which conversations he would carry on in French, having found out that Jessie spoke that language quite as well as her own. Need I continue? One afternoon he persuaded her to take a drive with him, and when they

were quite alone, away from the town, he asked her if she would be his wife and share his new home.

"Are you sure you love me well enough?" asked Jessie with a certain amount of indecision in her tone.

"I am quite certain of myself Jessie," he replied. "But what are your feelings?"

"Oh I have no fears," said Jessie trembling, and then glancing at him with her great blue eyes she added "Mr. Clifton I will put your love to the test, and only consent to marry you upon one condition. You must not enquire into my past life and trust me when I tell you that I have done nothing dishonorable."

"I should never have asked you if I could not trust you implicitly and I give you the promise," was Howard's answer.

"Happy's the wooing"

"That's not long a-doing"

are old lines oft repeated and you will easily understand that very little time was required for Jessie to prepare a *trousseau*, which had not to be inspected by fashionable bridesmaids or inquisitive friends. So before the first blast of winter bore down upon Calgary Jessie Graham had become Mrs. Clifton, and guided the indoor arrangements of her husband's farm.

CHAPTER II.

The next twelve months passed away without any event worth recording, save that a baby in the shape of a fine strapping boy made his appearance in Clifton's home, and the melancholy look in Jessie's eyes had gradually given place to a sort of relieved and happy expression, her musical laughter being often heard to gladden her husband's heart.

Trust, the bulldog, had taken serious council with himself, when his master was married, as to whether his own ugly nose, which wore the appearance of having been smashed by a blunt instrument, soon after birth, had been put out of joint or not, but after deep consideration, deciding in the negative, he devoted himself to his new mistress with the tenacity for which his breed is celebrated. He even condescended to take the baby under his protection, and would station himself on guard beside the cradle in a manner which gratified the young mother greatly.

It was an early day in January when after a hard frost, the chinook wind blowing from the Pacific through the Rockies, giving a brief and deceptive foretaste of spring, that Clifton drove off to Calgary to complete the sale of some cattle, leaving his wife and child practically in charge of Trust, for the few ranchmen, belonging to the farm, were employed at a distance from the house, and the girl who helped Mrs. Clifton did not count for much. It would have amused some of Howard Clifton's former acquaintances to have seen the ex-guardsman, who had been used to all the luxuries of civilized life, a member of two or three of the leading London clubs,