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The Possessor of 14 Diplomas and Certificates
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Old Hagar's Secret

BY MRS. M. J. HOLMES

Author of "For a Woman's Sake," "Love's Triumph,"

"Purified by Suffering," "A Grass Widow,"

"Woman Against Woman," Etc.

Toward evening, alarmed by a whizzing sound, which seemed to be often repeated, and wishing to know the cause, she stole half-way down the stairs, when the mischievous Mag greeted her with a "serpent," which, hissing beneath her feet, sent her quickly back to her room, from which she did not venture again. Mrs. Jeffrey was very good-natured, and reflecting that "young folks must have fun," she became at last comparatively calm, and at an early hour sought her pillow. But thoughts of "Stars and Stripes" warring directly over her head, as she knew they were, made her nervous, and the long clock struck the hour of two while she was yet restless and wakeful.

"Maybe the Saint's Rest will quiet me to rest," she thought, and, striking a light, she attempted to read; but in vain, for every word was a "star," every line a "stripe," and every leaf a "flag." Shutting the book and hurriedly pacing the floor, she exclaimed: "It's of no use trying to sleep, or meditate either. Baxter himself couldn't do it with that thing over his head, and I mean to take it down. It's a duty I owe to King George's memory and to Madam Conway." And stealing from her room she groped her way up the dark, narrow stairway, until, emerging into the bright moonlight, she stood directly beneath the American banner, waving so gracefully in the night wind. "It's a clever enough device," she said, gazing rather admiringly at it. "And I'd let it be if I posed I could sleep a wink; but I can't. It's worse for my nerves, than strong green tea, and I'll not lie awake for all the Yankee flags in Christendom." So saying, the resolute little woman tugged at the quilt frame until she loosened it from its fastenings, and then started to return.

But, alas! the way was narrow and dark, the banner was large and cumbersome, while the lady that bore it was nervous and weak. It is not strange, then, that Maggie, who slept at no great distance, was awakened by a tremendous crash, as of some one falling the entire length of the tower stairs, while a voice, frightened and faint, called out: "Help me, Margaret, do I am dead! I know I am!"

Striking a light, Maggie hurried to the spot, while her merry laugh aroused the servants, who came together in a body. Stretched upon the floor, with one foot thrust entirely through the banner, which was folded about her so that the quilt frame lay upon her bosom, was Mrs. Jeffrey. The broad fall of her cap standing up erect, and herself asserting with every breath that "she was dead and buried, she knew she was."

"Wrapped in a winding sheet, I'll admit," said Maggie, "but not quite dead, I trust." And putting down her light, she attempted to extricate her governess, who continued to apologize for what she had done. "Not that I cared so much about your celebrating America, but I couldn't sleep with the thing over my head. I was going to put it back in the morning before you were up. There! there! careful! It's broken short off!" she screamed, as Maggie tried to release her foot from the rent in the linen sheet, a rent which the frightened woman persisted in saying "she could darn as good as new" while at the same time she implored of Maggie to handle carefully her ankle, which had been sprained by the fall.

Forcing back her merriment, which in spite of herself would occasionally

burst forth, Maggie made her teacher as comfortable as possible and then staid with her until morning, when, leaving her in charge of a servant, she went below to say farewell to her guests. Between George Douglas and Theo there were a few low-spoken words, she granting him permission to write, while he promised to visit her again in the early autumn. He had not yet talked to her of love, for Rose Warner had still a home in his heart, and she must be dislodged ere another could take her place. But this affection for her was growing gradually less. Theo suited him well, her family suited him better, and when at parting he took her hand in his he resolved to ask her for it when next he came to Hillsdale.

Meanwhile between Henry Warren and Maggie there was a far more affectionate farewell, he whispered to her of a time not far distant when he would claim her as his own and she should go with him. He would write to her every week, he said, and Rose should write, too. He would see her in a few days, and tell her of his engagement, which he knew would please her.

"Let me send her a line," said Maggie, and on a tiny bit of paper she wrote: "Dear Rose—Are you willing I should be your sister Maggie?" Half an hour later and Hagar Warren, coming through the garden gate, looked after the carriage which bore the gentlemen to the depot, muttering to herself: "I'm glad the high heels have gone. A ride to them both."

In her disorderly chamber, too, Mrs. Jeffrey hobbled on one foot to the window, where, with a deep sigh of relief, she sent after the young men a not very complimentary adieu. Which was closed in part by the servants below, while Theo, on the piazza, exclaimed against "the lonesome old house, which was never so lonesome before," and Maggie seated herself upon the stairs and cried!

CHAPTER IX.

Nestled among the tall old trees which skirt the borders of Leominster village, was the bird's-nest of a cottage, which Rose Warner called her home, and which, with its wealth of roses, its trailing vines and flowering shrubs, seemed fitted for the abode of one like her. Silent as a white dove, when first the morning sun it unfolds its delicate petals, she seemed too frail for earth, and both her aunt and he whom she called brother watched carefully lest the cold north wind should blow too closely on the golden curls, which shaded her childish brow. Very, very beautiful was little Rose, and yet few ever looked upon her without a feeling of sadness; for in the deep blue of her eyes there was a mournful dreamy look, as if the shadow of some great sorrow were resting thus early upon her.

And Rose Warner had a sorrow, too, a grief which none save one had ever suspected. To him it had come with the words, "I cannot be your wife, for I love another, one who will never know how dear he is to me."

The words were involuntarily spoken, and George Douglas, looking down upon her, guessed rightly that he "who would never know how dear he was beloved," was Henry Warren. To her of course that Henry was something dearer than a brother had come slowly, filling her heart with pain, for she well knew that whether he clasped her to his bosom, as he often did, or pressed his lips upon her brow, he thought of her only as a brother, thinking of her as a beautiful and idealized sister. It had heretofore been some consolation to know that his affections were untrammelled by thoughts of another, that she alone was the object of his love. But now, when she thought faintly whispered of what, perchance, might be; but from that dream she was waking now, and her face grew whiter still, as there came to her from time to time letters fraught with praises of Margaret Miller; and if in Rose Warner's nature there had been a particle of bitterness it would have been called forth toward one whom she foresaw would be her rival. But Rose knew no malice, and she felt that she would sooner die than do ought to mar the happiness of Maggie Miller.

For nearly two weeks she had not heard from Henry, and she was beginning to feel very anxious, when one morning, two or three days succeeding the memorable Hillsdale celebration, as she sat in a small arbor so thickly overgrown with the Michigan rose as to render her invisible at a little distance, she was startled by hearing him call her name, as he came in quest of her down the garden walk. The next moment she held him in her arms, kissing her forehead, her lips, and his cheek; then holding her off, he looked to see if there had been in her aught of a change since last they met.

"You are paler than you were, Rose, darling," he said, "in your eyes look as if they had of late been used to tears. What is it, dearest? What troubles you?"

Rose could not answer immediately, for his sudden coming had taken away her breath, and as he saw a faint blush stealing over her face, he continued: "Can it be my little sister has been falling in love during my absence?"

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