

WANTED—A COMPANION.

(Continued.)

"Ah!" she gasped.

"I will not imagine anything soiling the purity of my wife, but I will fight the evil you dread, and I will save you. I love you." Then, with his face white and still, he laid one hand on her shoulder and said: "Come this way, the rest are near."

That evening Miss Scott and Newsom had a talk.

"I am engaged to Miss Travers," he began.

"Indeed!" The lady bristled. "May I enquire the kind of engagement? The words have a generally accepted meaning, but your manner of delivering them is somewhat peculiar, and I must ask you to be more particular."

"It is the usual meaning, I hope; I intend to make Miss Travers my wife."

"Still you are odd."

"I suppose I am. I ought to have asked your consent; I ought to have come to you smiling and radiant; for she, Ellen," he lingered lover-like over the name, "confesses that she loves me. But what is her trouble? What are her people? What are her family anxieties?"

"None, my dear sir—none, I say to each of your questions."

"No," he said. "You are ignorant as I am ignorant, but she has a dread. She says she has been at 'peace' with you: she has had a new life, a new hope. But now she says she is 'doomed, ruined!' What does it mean? She loves me and acknowledges that I might save her, but—she will not be engaged to me, she will not be my wife—she will fly!"

"Where to? Psha!" Miss Scott was getting rampant over this restiveness of her companion. "I'll talk to her."

"Yes." Newsom walked across the room and back again. "But do not talk much. Ellen is stronger, more wilful than you think."

"I know her pretty well."

He went on:

"And I am all in the dark, you see; this little thing is so evil in her eyes that she will hold back for nothing. She is desperate. I am obliged to be in England in two days; you will guard her?"

"I'll watch my lady, you may be sure. She has been depressed lately; can any of her people be insane?"

"That would be no disgrace. Promise me that you will guard her; promise me that you will keep me in cognisance of your whereabouts."

"I shall be thankful." Miss Scott looked a little scared. "I want no sensations. I shall send her home if she becomes unmanageable."

"No, not that. Though, where is her home, and what is it?"

"Her father is a parson somewhere in Derbyshire."

"I know Derbyshire!" the young man cried. "She, your companion, the daughter of the Rev. Hugh Travers at Moreton Mill—never!"

"Why not?"

"Because Travers belongs to Lord Hallamville's family. He is unmarried too."

"What! Do you know her aunt, Miss Travers?"

"No, my Travers has no sister."

"He can't be my Travers then."

Next day Newsom left Brussels.

So did Miss Scott, though she waited a full week for letters and the acknowledgement of her packet of lace. None came, so she wrote again and told her people to write to Munich.

She and Ellen got to Munich, and Ellen was her sweet self, and no sign of tragedy did Miss Scott find, though she watched with the keenest of keen eyes.

Ellen was gay as she anticipated Miss Scott's first demand.

"Shall I go to the Poste Restante for you?" she asked.

"Ay, do; it is near the hotel. You don't want any letter yourself, of course?"

"Indeed, no. I never do—such a trouble to answer them."

"Not one?"

"Dear Miss Scott," the girl said with a charming tenderness, and yet with eagerness too, "no. I have said 'No.' And you do not help me to keep that letter away."

But she had her letter from Newsom. Miss Scott, too, got her news—no lace had ever been received at Urchester.

"That Belgian post-office!" The lady was furious. "I'll make them compensate me."

CHAPTER VIII. NEWSOM IN LONDON.

The summer ran through pleasantly, and Ellen with Miss Scott saw many places.

Newsom was in London; a devoted lover, to judge by his letters. also he had a "run over" to Munich for a week to see them when there.

November found the two ladies on the Riviera; and also to the Riviera four orphan cousins of John Newsom were betaking themselves. To see John's *fiancée* was a grand excitement.

Some days passed, and then on each day he got news of the girls' whereabouts—he was guardian to them—news not at all personal, but sent by sending a local newspaper. But at last—on the Saturday—he had a letter, a note from Miss Scott, and, above all, a letter from Ellen. On the Sunday he was smoking the pipe of bachelor delight, when he took up one of his cousins' many newspapers. Political news—rather late; local news—nothing; police news—great: two large robberies, and, as the editor remarked, evidently of a sequence with other robberies; all at hotels too.

By hazard the next was a Paris paper of high class, in which politics reigned. However, at the end of one sentence here spoke of the search after the perpetrators of the most daring robbery known of late years being utterly unsuccessful. No clue could be found. The society in the palace of M. le Duc de X—was simply a society of private friends; the servants were above suspicion. But the Paris police were a body of immeasurable sagacity—so on—so on.

"At the dull time of the year," Newsom said to himself, "we in England indulge in murders and suicides. I suppose France finds more attraction in the diplomacy and finesse of these wonderful burglaries."

Nevertheless, before he went to bed he wrote at the end of a missive he had written but left unsealed till the morning, these words:

"We get news of daring robberies going on abroad in hotels and private houses. Do not leave any valuables about; and advise Miss Scott to be careful. She has diamonds with her I know. Do not let her say, 'Oh, they are nothing!' These gentry are as ready to take one trinket as a whole jewel-case. But I dare say you will be well up in the unpleasant news."

After that he took his candle and went through to his bedroom.

"No need," he said to himself, "to write to the girls about it. They are in mourning; all their things are locked up and left behind."

He went to bed and slept the sleep of the just till the morning hours, when visions of his love in the power of burglars terrified him into wakefulness. He turned up his gas and set himself to read. It was by no means night, but the dense foggy darkness of the London working day. Milkmen and newspaper-boys and the shrieks of the underground railway heralded the day, and very soon the day came in the shape of a rap at his door and hot water.

Something vague clinched a desire into a determination with John Newsom. Instead of running down to Herefordshire for the Christmas week he would go south. Hotel life for ladies alone was hazardous. But, strange to say, he did not in the face of this suddenly developed fact attach it to the case of his cousins, who were also his wards, but rather to Miss Scott and Ellen Travers—to Miss Scott, the hardened traveller.

Before the day arrived for packing his portmanteau for this said southern journey, he had one more letter from Ellen Travers.

It was a strange letter. It began by coldly-written words breaking off her engagement. Then, as if to repair the cruelty of the coldness, her writing was as impassioned as those words of hers at Waterloo had been. Then she ended in this way:

"I ought to tear up what I have written; but I will not allow you, my love, to judge me falsely. I am not cold; but that does not change the necessity. I say farewell.—ELLEN."

No other word softened this signature.

CHAPTER IX. THE WALL OVERLOOKING THE SEA.

Very oddly it was by the same train in which the Wilson girls, Newsom's cousins, were travelling that Miss Scott and Ellen left Marseilles. But they were not yet to meet. The swift *train de luxe* after flying down to Marseilles goes more leisurely, and it was at a much smaller place than Cannes that Miss Scott chose to stay.

Where she did stop there were but few hotels, and they quite different to the huge places of the main towns. Sainte Marce was a lovely Mediterranean village. Olives crowned the hills, and at the feet of olives grew the trellised vines; village girls and youths sing and danced in those soft southern December days; far away on distant hill-tops there shone the silver of snow, but snow was as a thing unknown down in the shelter of Sainte Marce.

In the little inn there were two more visitors—visitors of account, that is, for natives came in and got the news, drank the red wine, played at the bowls on the white road in front, and flirted with Therese and Gabrielle of the hotel.

The two strangers—profitable visitors for the winter, it was said—were a Mlle. St. Armand and an oldish lady, her companion. Already it had gone forth to the village that the poor mademoiselle was afflicted. Hush! and the villagers touched their foreheads as much as to say she was demented.

Miss Scott, walking under the vines of the garden at midday, found Mademoiselle de la Maure similarly inclined, and the two talked as chaperons do about their young people.

"Ah," said the French lady, "I see you have the idea the village folks have. They shun us; and *la pauvre* Isabelle is sensitive—she knows why they do it, and this will retard her cure."

Madame de la Maure spoke English well when she stopped to think of her words, but in haste or excitement she spoke a jargon of French and English combined. She was a handsome woman on the far side of fifty, with ruffled white hair, and strongly marked black eyebrows. She informed Miss Scott that she was a widow, an Alsatian, and she had now, at her age, to work for her bread.

But she loved Isabelle as if she were her own. She would take her back to Metz when the spring came quite well.

"She looks sad."

"Si, si." Madame shrugged her shoulders. "That is it. It was an *affaire du cœur*; but she will forget."

"Let her make friends with my Ellen."

"Ah, Madame, if she would! But Isabelle will speak to no young girl. I will control her if I may, but—" a shrug of the shoulders spoke volumes. "To see your charming niece will perhaps—perhaps increase the melancholy of Isabelle; I should then leave Sainte Marce."

"Because of us? Indeed no! We are always on the move; we will go. Anyway, we shall go in a week."