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Woman Against Woman

or A Terrible Accusation.

CHAPTER I.

"Ailsa!"

The tall, bulky, brutal form bent above the girl lying upon a miserable semblance of a bed in one corner of a wretchedly furnished room, but so soundly was she sleeping, that she failed to hear.

"Ailsa!"

He bawled the name out angrily, but even then it might have met with like results, but that he emphasized it with a kick from the toe of his heavy boot.

She groaned and sat up rubbing her eyes like a tired child, and blinked up at him.

It was a face that would have touched one less hardened than Dowd Valworth—a lovely wan face surrounded with curling hair of Cimmerian darkness, great liquid dark eyes that would have been the glory of any owner, a clear, olive complexion which not even starvation and exposure to all kinds of weather had power to ruin. But if he saw it all, it only angered him.

"Did you want me, father," she stammered, sleepily. "I'm so tired!"

"Yes, I wanted you—father!" he sneered, as if in imitation of her tone. "When did any one ever see you when you were not tired! It is your chronic state. Get up!"

She staggered up from the wretched pile of straw with its one covering, and shivered.

"I didn't go to bed until—" she began, apologetically; but he interrupted her with a vile oath.

"Who cares what time you went to bed! Get up and get me some breakfast, and be spry about it!"

She went wearily toward an old cupboard, so broken and forlorn that no pawnbroker would advance a cent upon it, and opened the doors. There was not a thing in it but a few broken dishes—not even a crust of bread. She turned to him desperately.

"You know there is nothing here!" she cried out, defying his anger. "You know you—"

"Never mind what I know!" he cried, shaking his heavy fist in her face. "How dare you speak to me like that? Do you want to be carried to the hospital again? I'll break every bone in your body if you don't take care. Get me something to eat!"

"I gave you all the money I had last night. You have gambled and drunk it away, and now—"

Before she could finish the sentence a heavy blow from Dowd Valworth's fist sent her spinning into a corner, where she fell and lay still, stunned for a moment into insensibility.

When she did move, he walked over to her and touched her with his foot again, noting that she replied with a groan. It told him that she still lived—lived to suffer.

"You had no business goading me to it!" he exclaimed, sullenly. "You always make me hit you, whether I want to or not, by your infernal taunts. Suppose I did gamble! Wasn't there just as much chance of my winning as losing? And could I ask my friends here to play without offering them some kind of refreshment? You are the most inconsiderate person I ever knew, Ailsa! Why the deuce don't you get up? What are you lying there groaning for? Are you trying to tempt me to hit you again?"

She sat up, both hands pressed upon her breast, her face ashen, her beautiful eyes dull and deadened with suffering.

"You will kill me some day, father," she gasped.

"If I do, you will be to blame for it!" he answered, brutally. "I always thought you would send me to the gallows sooner or later. Go and get me something to eat, I tell you!"

She looked up helplessly. The scene was no new one to her. They had gone through it on an average of five times a week for the last year, but that did not help her to bear it better. She was worn out, prematurely old, under the suffering, and a hopeless misery had settled about her sweet mouth that was infinitely pathetic.

"Father," she panted, still holding her hands upon her breast as if the pain were almost unbearable, "when is this to end? Twice already I have been arrested for begging in the streets. The judge assured me the last time that if I came before him again he would send me to the Island. You will not let me work. Four times I have secured a place, and because my employer would not advance you money, you have forced me to leave. You know perfectly well that there is but one way for me to obtain money, and not to save my own life will I do that!"

"You are always thinking of your own life, and never of that of any one else!" he whined, as if he were the most cruelly treated person upon earth. "You never think of me at all. I may suffer everything and much you care! You know that Nathan Simonson is only too anxious to make you his wife. He is rich—so rich that he has promised to give me all the money I want of my own if you will only become his wife, and yet you are hard-hearted enough to refuse."

She tottered up and took a worn, dilapidated hat down from a peg, then wrapped a shawl about her, a little, thin, faded thing that would not have protected her from a zephyr.

There was a sob in her throat which she could scarcely restrain, and yet her voice was brave as she turned to him.

"The wife of that odious creature!" she exclaimed. "I had rather be the wife of any wild beast in the forests of Africa!"

There was such loathing, such disgust in the tone, that there could be no mistaking her meaning, and with an oath Dowd Valworth placed himself between her and the door. His brows were drawn together in a heavy frown, his eyes gleamed fiercely, his breath, hot and foul with the fumes of dead beer, swept sickeningly across her face. His former ill temper seemed to be only play compared with this.

"By the powers! you shall be his wife, or I'll know the reason why! I have fooled away time enough catering to your ladyish whim, but it is done now. I thought you would have sense enough to see the advantage of marrying him, but you only see that which you want to see. You know that I am not a man to be tempted. Money is necessary to me, and if you can not supply it one way, you shall another. To please your ladyship I have lived in this foul penury, sleeping upon straw, living upon the worst of food; but I shall continue it no longer. Refuse to become Nathan Simonson's wife, and I promise you that you shall regret it in sackcloth and ashes to the last day of your life. Now go! Return here in half an hour with money enough for a good breakfast and a glass of something warm to give a fellow an appetite, or you'll get the worst licking you ever had in your life. And mark you this: I give you until to-night to make up your mind about old Nathan. If you still refuse—well, you know I ain't a man to threaten, but you also know that I never fail to have a just and sweet revenge."

He threw her across the hall and out the door as he finished speaking, closing and locking it upon her. She leaned against the wall for a moment to get strength sufficient to descend the rickety stairs then made her way out of the tenement. The stinging air of the street seemed to put new vitality into her staggering limbs, and she walked along more quickly, the hopeless misery of her countenance deepening, if that were possible.

"He will keep his word!" she groaned. "He will keep his word if I refuse, yet how can I ever consent? How can I—"

She stopped suddenly with a little gasp, for there in her path stood Nathan Simonson himself, a coarse, heavy, thick-lipped brute, his long Jewish nose flattened out over his face, his small, beady, restless eyes fixed hungrily upon her. It seemed to her that she was looking into the eyes of some famished beast, which was ready to spring upon its long withheld prey.

She uttered a little cry and stood there as if fascinated, unable to move.

"I was just going to see papa," he said, smiling at her in a hateful way peculiar to himself, "and hoped for the pleasure of meeting his charming daughter there. Are you going out so early in the morning for a constitutional?"

There are no words to describe the guttural bestiality of the voice, or the despicable intonation of the inoffensive words. She would have turned and fled, but that she could not have removed her eyes from his if her life had depended upon it.

"He is—there!" she gasped. "I was just—just going for some—breakfast for him."

"Get enough for three," he said, "and I will breakfast with you. Your dear papa will be delighted to see me. I hope I shall have as warm a welcome from the pretty daughter."

Ailsa shuddered.

"Dear papa is always promising me a warm welcome from her," he continued, as she was silent; "but it never comes. Why, pretty one? I am going to ask him to confirm his words this morning. I am going to ask him—"

He had taken her hand, but suddenly, given a power which would have been impossible to her a moment before, she wrenched it from him and sped up the street as rapidly as her frail strength would carry her.

He turned and looked after her, his singularly white teeth gleaming under his bushy black beard, his beady eyes taking on a fierce gleam that would have put that of Dowd Valworth to the blush.

"I can compel Valworth to force her to do it, and I will, curse her!" he muttered. "We shall see, my beauty, who shall be the victor!"

But Ailsa had never paused to look backward.

She sped onward—onward, striving with all her might to shut out the sight of his hateful face, to shut out the sound of his despicable voice, until at last she fell from sheer exhaustion across the street. Once, twice, she tried to rise, but the effort was fruitless, and then—darkness and insensibility came to her relief.

CHAPTER II.

Ailsa had completely lost trace of time when she awakened from her long swoon.

Not knowing what had happened to her, she lifted herself up and looked about her. She was quite alone. There was nothing in the room to tell her where she was. In one corner was an old bench, the only furniture the room contained; but the stone floor, the barred windows and door, told her plainly enough where she was.

She stared up as she realized that she was in prison, but the ache in her head caused her to sink back in excruciating pain. She groaned aloud. She had no idea of the reason of her arrest, scarcely any remembrance of the events that had preceded it, and the terrible misery in her heart, aside from her physical anguish, caused her to care little either for what had or what might happen.

As she became more conscious of her surroundings, she heard swearing in the room adjoining, the grating of keys, the noise of rough voices of policemen, but still lay there upon the horribly cold stone floor until she heard the sound of a key in the lock of her own door.

She sat up, and with wildly staring eyes looked up at the man who entered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "So you've come round at last, have you. One more drunk like that, and it would be the end of you. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, and you scarcely more than a kid? Do you know how long you've been here?"

"No, sir," she stammered, lifting her hand to her aching head.

"Don't, eh? Well, I don't wonder. You've been here since yesterday morning. Yesterday morning—think of that! And I'll swear you ain't sober yet! Is this your first offense?"

She looked at him in a dazed sort of way, and did not endeavor to reply.

"Don't want to give yourself away, eh?" he asked, with a short laugh. "Well, you are a knowin' one, for your age. Come along, then. You ought to be sent to the care of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, instead of the Island."

"Where?" gasped Ailsa.

"The Island. Dear little innocent! Ain't never heard of such a place, have you? Just come through the doors of a Sunday school, didn't you? Come along! I reckon the judge will make short work of you."

Ailsa made no reply. It seemed to her that it mattered little where she was sent, so long as she escaped from the bondage which had held her soul and body. Her head was aching so that it was with difficulty that she followed the policeman, even held up and hurried on by him as she was. She glanced about her as she was thrust into the prisoners' pen, noting the sodden faces, the leering eyes, and sinking back into her corner with a shiver of repulsion and horror which even illness could not deaden.

Twice before in her short life she had been in that place, both times arrested for begging in the streets, forced to it by her wretched father; but now she had been brought there as a "drunk and disorderly," and as she glanced about her, she found herself sufficiently awakened to the horrors of life to wonder if her face looked like those others which she saw about her.

One or two of her companions made lewd jests at her expense; but her mind was as clean as that of an infant, in spite of her former surroundings, and she paid no heed, through innocence. She was too faint, too ill, to consider time, and had no knowledge of how long it was until the policeman who had brought her there returned to take her out.

The room was filled with those not prisoners—some wretched-looking people summoned for ejectment, with crying children dragging at their sides; some flashily dressed woman who cared little how they "put money in their purse," so long as they found it there; a few persons of eminent respectability, and some lawyers.

Not that Ailsa took in so much of her surroundings. On the contrary, she saw nothing, heard nothing. She sank into the chair toward which the policeman led her, and heard only the low-spoken words of the justice, as he asked:

"What is she here for?"

"Drunk and disorderly," answered the policeman. "I found her lying across the sidewalk early yesterday morning. It has taken her all this time to get sober."

"What have you to say?" asked the justice, sternly.

"I wasn't drunk," she answered, her face flushing scarlet, as she seemed to realize for the first time the awful charge that had been brought against her. "I never touched a drop in my life. I—"

"Haven't you been here before?" asked the justice. "It seems to me that your face is familiar to me. Where have I seen you?"

"I was up for—"

She began the sentence bravely, but choked and could get no further. Still, it was enough; he remembered. He had been kind to her before, but kindness seemed to have availed her nothing.

"Ten dollars or ten days!" he announced.

Ailsa groaned. What was she to do? She turned away, with the bitterness of an awful despair in her heart, and struggled from the chair. She had no idea of making a plea to him for sympathy. She knew just how useless it would would. She must go to that awful place, and leave it with the odor of the workhouse upon her—leave it with a blight upon her life that nothing under heaven could ever lift!

She tottered and would have fallen down the one step leading to the courtroom, but that she was suddenly caught by a strong hand and held not unkindly. It was not the touch of the policeman. She glanced up hastily.

What woman has ever forgotten the first glance into the face of him who is to be the ruling power of her whole after-life? What woman has ever ceased to remember the first expression of him who guides her future for good or ill?

The man who had caught her was not one of the usual "hangers-on" about the court-room. He was tall and handsome as Apollo, with his long, lithe, graceful limbs and magnificent physique. His hair was short and inclined to curl, and of that strangely beautiful reddish brown that one so rarely sees upon a man. His eyes were a dark violet, almost a velvety black in certain lights, and shaded by lashes that swept his cheek like those of a girl. His mouth was as sweet and sympathetic as that of a child, and yet from brow to throat there was not a weak line in the strangely handsome face. It was a combination of strength and beauty that had puzzled physiognomist and artist alike.

"Have you hurt your ankle?" he asked, gently, still holding her.

All at once she could find no voice in which to reply. She tried to say something, to draw herself from him; but her efforts were only rewarded by a piteous flood of tears which she could not restrain.

He drew her even more closely to him.

"Poor child!" she heard him murmur.

He placed her in a chair, and, bending over her, whispered in her ear:

"Don't cry. I'll pay the fine. They shall not punish you this time."

Before she could find words to reply he was gone; and as she strained her streaming eyes to look after him, she heard two men sitting at a table remark:

"Leslie Dunraven is paying her fine. Wonder if he knows her? This is a sensation for the papers. Let's get at him."

And then their conversation was lost, as they moved away; but she heard one policeman remark to another:

"He comes to dispossess a tenant, and pays the fine of a drunk and disorderly! There ain't never any knowin' what those swells will do before they leave the court. I wonder how it would seem to have money enough to squander in that way? Darned pretty girl, though! I wonder what my lady will say when she hears of this?"

Then both men laughed.

But Ailsa had no time to think of what they meant, for almost at once Leslie Dunraven was bending over her again.

"It is all right!" he exclaimed. "Come away at once. The reporters are anxious to get the story, and I am equally anxious that they should not."

He had taken her by the arm and was leading her from the court-room. Her tears were dried suddenly, and as she reached the door and realized that she would probably never see this man again—this one human being who had been kind to her—an irresistible desire for his respect took possession of her.

She caught his arm and looked up appealingly into his face.

"It isn't true that I was drunk!" she gasped. "I swear it to you. I don't know how I came there. I only know that I ran away from—him. The man my father would force me to marry—the man whom I detest, abhor! I was frightened. I had eaten nothing for two days, and I ran away. As I ran I fell. That is the last I know. I wakened up and found myself in that awful place. I don't know how. The officer said I had been drunk since yesterday morning, but I swear to you that I had not touched a drop, that I never—touched—"

She was swaying again. Her excitement had lent strength for a moment, but it was deserting her again.

Once more Leslie Dunraven caught her and held her up.

"Not eaten anything for three days!" he gasped. "Good heavens! I don't wonder you are done up. And you are almost frozen, too. Here, cabby, drive us to—"

(To be continued.)

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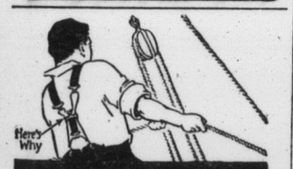

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8	47	22	4, 5, 5½, 7, 8½, 9, 9	.30
8	47	16½	4, 5, 5½, 7, 8½, 9, 9	.32
9	48	22	6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6	.34
9	48	16½	6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6	.36
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9	52	16½	4, 4, 5, 5½, 7, 8½, 9, 9	.36
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8 "	....	4.10	4.35
10 "	4.80	5.00	5.25
11 "	....	....	5.55
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13 "	....	....	5.85
14 "	....	....	6.10

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MAJOR-GENERAL ROBERTSON.

Chief of Imperial Staff Was Once a Private in the Ranks.

From the bottom to the top is the unusual record of Major-General Sir William Robert Robertson, new chief of staff of the British Army in succession to Major-General Sir James Wolfe Murray. Few men who in the last century have done what Major-General Robertson has just accomplished could be numbered on the fingers of one hand. Usually appointments in the past have been found for "rankers" in India and the colonial stations. Although Sir William Robertson has served in the army as a private and non-commissioned officer, however, he is quite well equipped for the high social position the new command confers upon him, for he is a gentleman by birth, had the advantage of private tuition in his youth, and probably enlisted in the army, as quite a few young gentlemen have been doing for several years now, with the deliberate purpose of "earning a commission."

Lady Robertson is a daughter of the late Lieutenant-General T. C. Palin, of the Bombay Staff Corps. Sir William, who is 54 years old, was born at Welbourne, Lincolnshire, his father being a well-known landed proprietor. The general was only 28 years old when he received, after seeing service in Egypt and the Soudan, his first commission as lieutenant in the Third Dragoon Guards. He did not serve many years in the ranks, and upon attaining his commission he set himself deliberatey to work to study for staff duties in the highly technical intelligence and transport branches. After he had passed through the staff college his first staff employment was as railway transport officer during the Miranzai and Black Mountain expeditions. His success in keeping the troops at the front fed with reinforcements and supplies attracted official attention, and he was promoted staff captain and appointed deputy assistant quartermaster-general of the intelligence branch at headquarters, Simla.

During the Chitral campaign General Robertson took the field as intelligence officer with the headquarters of the relief force. During the campaign he was severely wounded, was mentioned in despatches, and received, in addition to the campaign medal with two clasps, the coveted Distinguished Service Order. He was attached to the intelligence department at the War Office when he went out to South Africa as deputy assistant adjutant-general of intelligence at army headquarters, being specially selected for the post by Lord Roberts. For his services in South Africa he was promoted brevet lieutenant-colonel, mentioned in despatches, and awarded the service medal with four clasps. He was assistant director of military operations at the War Office for six years, assistant quartermaster-general at Aldershot, brigadier-general on the general staff at Aldershot, and commandant of the Staff College. In his capacity of commandant of the Staff College, General Robertson came into contact with a number of the officers of the Canadian permanent forces who went to Camberley to pass the staff course, and they all speak very highly of his technical knowledge and active energetic personality. He was at the front during the first part of the present war, and his military genius in organizing the retreat from Mons won for him the highest praise from General French.

Great Britain's Food Supply.

Great Britain imported 51,786,915 bushels of wheat from Canada in 1913. She also imported 12,789,969 bushels from Russia and Central Europe.

Great Britain imported 24,148,143 bushels of barley in 1913 from Russia, Roumania, Turkey, Germany and Austria. From Canada she took 5,977,533 bushels, or less than a fourth.

Great Britain took 22,454,683 bushels of oats from Germany, Russia and Roumania in 1913, of which one-half was from her bitterest and most savage enemy of to-day.

Great Britain imported 185,125,000 bushels of wheat from August 1, 1913, to July 31, 1914. Russia exported 163,267,000 bushels and Roumania 45,643,000 bushels in the same time. How far is Canada going to help to make up the deficiency?

Great Britain imported from Aug. 1, 1913, to July 31, 1914, 54,307,000 bushels of oats. Russia exported 34,750,000 bushels, Germany 25,077,000, and Roumania 17,195,000, bushels. Who is going to make up this deficiency of seventy-seven million bushels?

A Double-acting Retort.

Husband—I wish you'd stop this everlasting cackling about my expenditures.

Wife—No, I shan't. Cackling saved the capital of Rome and I'm going to see if I can't save your capital that way.

High Cost of Living.

"Doesn't it really seem that it gets more and more difficult to make a living?"

"Well, at any rate, it does to live on what one makes."