

A Woman with a History.

By Harkaru.

CHAPTER III.

"Why, what's the matter Jessie?" cried Clifton, as his wife met him, "you look as though you had seen a ghost. Nothing wrong with the boy, is there?"

"Oh no Howard,—baby is all right. I have been frightened that is all" replied Jessie trying to compose herself.

"Frightened! How!" exclaimed Clifton.

"It was nothing—two men tried to force their way into the house, while I was alone. But Trust barred the way" said Jessie with a laugh, in which there was no merriment.

"Good old Trust" remarked Clifton with a satisfied smile as he stooped to fondle his ugly staunch friend. "Well, there's no harm done Jessie, and you need not be afraid as long as you have Trust with you. What were the ruffians like?"

"Oh I could not tell you" was the reply "they ran away, as I closed the door—and baby was crying, so I did not watch them."

A half truth is often more deceiving than a direct falsehood, and Jessie's answer completely averted suspicion from the mind of her husband, who made light of the whole affair, saying he would have liked to have seen Trust putting the scoundrels to flight.

Then he talked pleasantly about other subjects, goodnatureedly striving to banish the expression of melancholy, which seemed to have returned, after an absence, to his wife's large blue eyes. He partially succeeded, for his great never-doubting love was inexpressibly sweet to her who had sought a refuge after trouble, but his success was only partial, for the shadow of the past, which had crossed her path that day, continued to rise up at intervals in spite of herself.

The next morning as Clifton was leaving the house to look round his farm, a buggy that was proceeding to the Indian Reserve, with a couple of English tourists, pulled up on the road and the driver dismounting came rapidly towards Clifton bearing a letter in his hand. Mrs. Clifton saw her husband walk forward to meet the man with an undefinable feeling of dread, but as she observed Howard calmly read the missive, and give some short message in reply she became easier, especially, when on thrusting the letter carelessly in his pocket, he returned merely remarking that someone wanted to see him in Calgary regarding a mine to be opened and that he would ride over that afternoon.

"I'll leave Trust to take care of you and the house, so you won't be afraid with you Jessie?" asked Clifton kindly.

"No—I think of" answered his wife a trifle dubiously.

"Well, if you had rather, I will send word for the man to come here" said Clifton.

"Do not think me so foolish" returned Jessie more cheerfully "I am sure I need not fear anything as long as I have Trust with me."

How would she have answered had she known, that the letter in her husband's pocket was signed "Robert Parsons"?

Leaving his horse, a few hours later, at the Royal Hotel Stables, Clifton walked into the main street of Calgary and entered an office, on the windows of which was the inscription, "Parsons and Rodney; Financial and Mining Agents." Papers and maps littered the desks and counter, but business did not appear to be very brisk, since both Robert Parsons and Denis Rodney were standing with their hands in their pockets, the former smoking a cigar, and the latter chewing a bit of straw.

As Clifton closed the door behind him Parsons, with an uncomfortable glance at the huge form of the visitor remarked "Mr. Clifton I presume. Will you step this way?" going into the inner or private office whither he was followed by Clifton and Rodney.

There was a table in the room at which the two partners seated themselves, with a gesture for Clifton to do the same, which he did, placing his heavy riding whip down on the table in front of him, and then he quietly waited to hear what the others had to say.

"I fear the business I sent to you about will not be particularly agreeable Mr. Clifton" began Parsons.

"I understood it was connected with the opening of a mine" said Clifton slightly raising his eyebrows.

"So it is" replied Parsons with an ugly smile "but there are some preliminaries to be gone through first. Did you ever hear Mr. Clifton of a music hall singer named Ida Montmorency?"

"Never" answered Clifton promptly.

"That of course was not her real name" said Parsons slowly "she was known as Miss Jessie Graham."

"Well?" demanded Clifton in a singularly quiet voice, though there was an ominous light in his eyes as he gazed straight at Parsons.

"Don't you catch on?" asked the latter in an astonished tone.

"Not yet; probably I shall do so presently. Is that all?"

"By no means Mr. Clifton. I was a clergyman once, and before Miss Graham say as Ida Montmorency, I mar-

ried her to Denis Rodney, this gentleman to my right."

The speaker paused but Clifton over whose face a stern expression spread uttered no sound.

"Of course, as you may judge from the sequel, the marriage was not a happy one" pursued Parsons "and Mr. Rodney is quite prepared to bury the past in oblivion—as am I myself—provided you make it worth our while."

A look of unutterable scorn flashed for a moment over the countenance of Clifton, but he remarked with wonderful calmness.

"You have opened your mind sir, but so far have only made bare assertions, which you will pardon my doubting without ample corroboration."

Rodney, who had never spoken so far, now pulled an old letter from his pocket and handed it to Clifton asking if he knew the handwriting. The epistle was very short running thus "When you publicly announce our marriage, I will come to you, but not before. That was the agreement, Jessie."

Clifton recognized the writing instantly, but the words "trust me when I tell you that I have done nothing dishonourable" seemed to be again repeated as the letter dropped from his hand.

"What followed?" he demanded quickly.

"I lost sight of her" said Rodney "and discovered her some months afterwards as Ida Montmorency, when she again disappeared and I never saw until Friday."

"Precisely. I have listened to you both patiently, and now you will hear me," replied Clifton so quietly that the two were astonished, but not for long for raising his voice as he clutched his riding whip he cried out "You are a pair of the most cowardly scoundrels I ever met. Take that, and that" saying which he stretched over the table and cut the two across their faces with his whip.

Then springing up he seized Rodney by the throat and flung him sprawling to the ground, after which he caught Parsons by the collar and dragging him away from the table, so as to be enabled to obtain a good sweep with his arm he administered about the soundest horsewhipping that ever one man gave another.

Parsons was a tolerably powerful man, but he was like a child in the hands of the big ex-guard'sman, who, as he lashed away, lifted him every now and then from his feet by the collar, and shook him, saying with grim humor, "I catch on now."

At last Clifton dropping his victim, who sunk to the floor, turned to seek Rodney, but the latter had taken ad-