

"And if I do—if I do, it is useless—all useless," she murmured.

"Yes," I observed, "it is useless. You are already married."

"No," she cried, holding up her tiny hands as though to stay my words. "Do not let us talk of it. I cannot bear to think. The truth hangs like a shadow over my life."

"Does Chetwode know?" I inquired. "Is he aware that you can never be his?"

"He knows nothing. He loves me, and believes that one day we shall marry. Indeed, now that he has succeeded to the estate he sees no reason why our marriage should be delayed, and is pressing me for an answer."

Her breast heaved and fell quickly beneath her starched blouse. I saw how agitated she was, and how with difficulty she was restraining her tears.

"What answer can you give him?"

"Ah!" she cried. "What answer, indeed! Was there ever woman before who knew not her husband, or who suffered as I am suffering?"

"Your case is absolutely unique," I said. "Have you not endeavoured to solve the problem? Surely from the official record of the marriage it is possible to obtain your husband's name? You have a wedding-ring, I suppose?" I said, my thoughts running back to that fateful moment when I had placed the golden band of matrimony upon her hand.

"Yes," she answered, and placing her hand within her bodice drew forth the ring suspended by a narrow blue ribbon. "It is here."

I took it in my hand with a feeling of curiosity. How strange it was. That was the very ring which I had placed upon her finger when in desperation I had sold myself to the Tempter.

"Have you no idea whatever of the circumstances of your marriage? Do you know nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing—save that I am actually married."

"The identity of the man who placed this ring upon your hand is an enigma?"

"Yes, I found it upon my finger. That is all that I am aware of. I changed my name, yet I am ignorant of what my new name really is."

A sound of wheels approaching on the drive greeted our ears, but I still held the ring in the hollow of my hand.

"Shall I tell you the true name of your husband?" I said, earnestly, looking straight into those clear deep eyes.

"What?" she cried, starting in quick surprise. "You know it? Surely that is impossible!"

"Yes," I said, in a low voice. "I know it."

At that instant the rail-car which had evidently been to Corsham Station, dashed past us towards the house, interrupting our conversation and causing us both to raise our heads.

At the side of Barton, the coachman, there sat a stranger who, as he passed, turned his head aside to glance at us.

Our eyes met. In an instant I recognised him. It was none other than the man for whom I had been in active search all those weeks—the Tempter.

(To be Continued.)

Serial Story.

(PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.)

A DAUGHTER OF MIDIAN.

By JOHN K. LEYS.

Author of "A Sore Temptation," "The Thumb-print," "The Broken Fetter," "In the Tolls," "A Million of Money," etc., etc.

COPYRIGHT.

PART II.—THE NARRATIVE OF SYBIL GRANT.

CHAPTER XIII.

I MAKE AN ENEMY.

I had sufficient food for thought that night, and for many nights to come. My conversation with Mr Mitchell had taught me a great deal, if not about myself, at least about the girl whose personality I had assumed. And I took a keen interest in all I had learned for two reasons—in the first place because I could not help entertaining a belief that I was connected with Sidney Grant by ties of blood; and in the second place because Mr Mitchell's conduct struck me as being very strange. It seemed to me that he was not acting in a straightforward way by Sidney Grant, any more than he had acted in a straightforward way by me. It may be that the fact that I am an adventuress, a daughter of Midian, a stranger playing an unworthy part to serve a selfish end, has made me unduly suspicious. It may be that I am scenting mysteries where there are none—and yet, one or two questions occur to me for which I confess I can see no glimmer of an answer.

Why should the laird take so much pains to preserve the evidence of the invalidity of the marriage of a mere acquaintance? And why should he offer to settle £300 a year upon a stranger? What was the nature of those claims which he declared did not exist, but which he was willing to pay heavily to get rid of? And then, there remained the old puzzle—Why did he take the trouble to provide for me till I had reached the age of womanhood, and then take the most elaborate precautions against my finding my benefactor? The longer I thought of it, the more convinced I became that Mr Mitchell was playing a double game.

In a few days I had a report from the Professor of the result of his journey to Scarton. He had set off at once—I was lucky in having so good and true a friend! Scarton is a very small place, scarcely more than a village, in a secluded Cumberland valley. Everybody there knew Miss Grant. She was a governess in a large girls' school of good standing kept by a Mrs Leadbitter. Miss Grant had been living at the school since she was a child—first as a pupil, and since she grew up as a teacher. She resembled me, the Professor said, both in face and in figure. He made no attempt to gain an interview with her, but he saw her at a short distance, and told me he could quite understand how anyone who had not seen her since she was a young girl should mistake me for her.

Not content with doing all I asked him to do, the Professor was at the pains to give me a list of the principal inhabitants of Scarton, such as the parson, the doctor, and the principal shopkeepers and farmers—such people as anyone who had resided for some years at the village would be sure to know. He said that I might at any moment betray myself by displaying a total ignorance about the place where I was supposed to have lived all my life, and he strongly advised me to learn by heart the details he sent me.

It was well for me that Signor Zucatti was so thoughtful, and well that I had to some extent followed his advice, for one day at lunch Miss Dalrymple surprised everybody by blurring out—"Do you know how Mr Pilsher is, Miss Grant?"

For a second I stared at her in dumb surprise, not knowing whom she meant; but suddenly I remembered that that was the name of the Vicar of Scarton. Before I could speak I

caught a quick glance which Miss Dalrymple darted at Mr Durant. Then in the space of a flash of lightning I understood that a trap had been laid for me, and that although the trap had been sprung by the woman, it had been set by the man.

"You mean Mr Pilsher the Vicar of Scarton?" I said with an expression of surprise. "He was very well when I saw him last. 'Do you know him?' 'I—I have heard of him. He must be a very old man by this time.'"

Now luckily I remembered that Signor Zucatti had mentioned that the Vicar had only been at Scarton a year or two; and I replied with a smile, "On the contrary, he is quite a young man. And he has been there only a short time. You must be thinking of somebody else." I would have given anything to be able to add, "You must be thinking of the present Vicar's father," but it was too great a risk. It was quite possible that Mr Durant knew that the Vicar was a young man, and had prompted Miss Durant to speak of him as an old man on purpose to entrap me.

As I had answered the remark in an indifferent tone, and with all the confidence that knowledge inspires, Miss Dalrymple looked rather foolish. I quite expected that Mr Mitchell would ask her what she knew of the Vicar of Scarton, and she looked so much afraid that some question of the kind would be put to her, that in pure mercy I changed the subject and withdrew the laird's attention from her.

But the incident filled me with grave uneasiness. It was plain that I was suspected, that I had an enemy—though why Mr Durant should take the trouble of meddling in the matter was more than I could understand.

Next morning Mr Mitchell set out on his accustomed journey to Glasgow, and Mr Durant accompanied him. Miss Dalrymple and I had the great house to ourselves, and the morning passed drearily. We kept apart most of the time, for since Miss Dalrymple had shown herself so openly a partisan of my enemy I felt rather afraid of her, in spite of her evident simplicity.

In the afternoon I wrote a note to a shop in Glasgow for some things I wanted for my toilet, and on putting it into the post-bag that hung in the hall, I found one other letter in the bag. Moved by mere idle curiosity I drew it out and looked at the address.

It was addressed to Mrs Leadbitter, Low Fell House, Scarton, Cumberland.

I stood with the letter in my hand, stupefied. Miss Dalrymple, of course. The handwriting told that. But why should Miss Dalrymple write to Mrs Leadbitter? Because Mr Durant was not satisfied, and had persuaded her to write and inquire whether Miss Grant was still at the school. Miss Dalrymple had been chosen as the instrument, because Mrs Leadbitter might not have answered an inquiry on such a subject coming from a man. The letter, I felt sure, could not have been prompted by Mr Mitchell. Mr Mitchell already knew Mrs Leadbitter, for he had put Miss Grant to school there. If he had wished to ask her a question about Miss Grant he would have written to her himself. No—this was Mr Durant's doing. Of that I felt assured.

But what was I to do? How was I to meet this fresh attack? I knew that the truth must come out some day, but I had hoped to find out something definite about my parentage first, and I thought I needed but a little more time to succeed. Could I not do something to ward off this blow, even for a few days?

Wild thoughts of taking the letter

upstairs and burning it came into my head, but I put them away at once. I was both afraid and ashamed to play a trick of that kind. I dropped the letter into the bag again, and went slowly upstairs.

By the time I had reached my own room my mind was made up. There was only one thing to do. I must go to Scarton, confide in Mrs Leadbitter, and beg her not to expose me for a little time. It was a faint chance—very faint; but it was my only one. Nothing could be plainer than this—that if I did not succeed in closing Mrs Leadbitter's mouth, at the end of two days I would be forced to leave the castle, and abandon all hope of fathoming the motive of Mr Mitchell's conduct towards me.

But could I possibly reach Scarton before Mrs Leadbitter posted her reply? In order to do that I knew I must travel by the mail car—with the letter itself, in fact, and if possible secure an interview with Mrs Leadbitter before it was delivered to her. But was there time? Yes, if I went by the postman's gig. I knew that people sometimes did this, when they were not rich enough to hire a conveyance of their own; and I did not care to ask for one of Mr Mitchell's carriages. I preferred to act independently.

Half-an-hour before the mail-gig was expected I put on my hat and jacket, and with my bag in my hand walked into the smaller drawing-room where Miss Dalrymple was sitting in solitary state, yawning over a novel.

"I am going to Glasgow—to Simpson, Hunter, and Young's," I said, as if the proposal were one that called for no remark. But Miss Dalrymple did not view it in that light.

"You never intend going all that way to-night!" she gasped out, letting her book fall to the floor in pure astonishment.

"Oh, yes. There's no reason why I shouldn't. They can't fit me properly if I don't go and see the dressmaker."

"But the shop will be shut long before you can get there! I am sure of it, for—"

"It is no matter. I can stay at an hotel, and see them in the morning."

"At an hotel! All by yourself!"

"Why not? I've often done it. If you wouldn't mind ordering a cup of tea for me, though, I would be greatly obliged to you."

"But you might just as well wait till to-morrow and go in by the early train," persisted Miss Dalrymple. I made her no answer; and as soon as the good woman saw that I was determined to go that day she exerted herself to such good purpose that a substantial meal was provided for me in time. Not content with this, Miss Dalrymple forced me to take with me a packet of sandwiches she had made herself, and a warm cloak of her own. The journey was long and dreary. I was unable to sleep in the train, and long before I crossed the border I was shivering with cold, in spite of Miss Dalrymple's cloak. At Carlisle I had of course to change my carriage, and it was nearly eight o'clock before I alighted at the little white-painted station of Scarton. I had the satisfaction of seeing the mail bag which contained Miss Dalrymple's letter taken out of the guards' van and handed to a white-haired postman who was waiting for it. So far, I had been successful.

There was a little inn, where I washed my face, and got a cup of coffee. At half-past eight I set out for Low Fell House, for I wished if possible to see Mrs Leadbitter before the letter reached her.

Early as it was, I was admitted at

ROWLAND'S MACASSAR OIL

FOR THE HAIR.

Preserves, Beautifies, Nourishes and Restores it more effectually than anything else; prevents grey hair and scurf. For Ladies and Children it is the best preparation; also in a Golden Colour for fair or grey hair.

ROWLAND'S ODONTO

FOR THE TEETH.

Whitens and Preserves them, prevents decay, sweetens the breath. Ask for Rowland's articles, of Hatton Garden, London. Sold by Chemists and Stores.