

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd)

White to the lips, but with an incredulous smile, Floris rose from her chair and confronted her.

"You are either a very wicked girl, Josine, or you are mad," she said. "You know what it is that you have said?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," responded Josine, sullenly; "and I am not mad. Wicked? Yes, I have been wicked, and I should be still, if my conscience would let me rest; but it will not. I cannot be Miladi Blanche's slave any longer."

"Tell me all you want to tell me, and then go!" exclaimed Floris, feebly.

"Mademoiselle knows Lord Norman goes out hunting to-day? In an hour or more he will have gone."

Floris's lips formed a "Yes."

"Soh! And that the ladies are to take an excursion—an expedition? Yes! Well, then, what if I say Milord Norman will return—alone—by himself at noon? What if I say that Miladi Blanche will make an excuse and remain at home? and that they will meet in the conservatory and fly together?"

"It is a lie!" panted Floris.

"Soh! Softly, mademoiselle. Proof is what I offered, and it is what I will give. Suppose, when you are starting, you find that miladi refuses to go? That she decides to remain at home? She has the headache, say? She will stay in the house, eh?"

Floris rose up and stared at the black eyes with a wild fascination.

"Will that convince mademoiselle? Yes, or no?"

"No! a thousand times no!" exclaimed Floris.

Josine shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, well, but you are difficult to convince! Mademoiselle is so young and so innocent that she cannot believe that others not so young and so innocent can be so wicked! Well, now, what if—" she lowered her voice and crept nearer to Floris, "what if I take mademoiselle to the conservatory, and she see and hear miladi and Lord Norman— Ah!"

Floris shuddered.

"Not till then would I believe you," she said, trying to speak dauntlessly.

"Good!" ejaculated Josine. "And then, when mademoiselle sees with her own eyes and hears with her own ears, what about it then?"

She paused, and leaned over Floris.

"If I show this to mademoiselle, if I convince her that what I have told her at so much cost to myself is true, will mademoiselle promise me to utter no word, to tell no one, but to leave Ballyfoe at once? If not, I will do nothing. If not, I am ruined. Miladi Blanche has me in the hollow of her hand, and she must not know that I have betrayed her. If I show mademoiselle that I have not lied, if I prove to her that I have told her the truth, will she leave Ballyfoe at once?"

"Yes," said Floris, putting the hair from her brow, "I consent. It is wrong, I know it, I feel it, but I cannot help it. I am like a reed in your hands. May Heaven forgive you, Josine, if you are deceiving me. And yet, and yet, would to Heaven that you may be deceiving me. Yes, if—what you say is true, I will promise to leave Ballyfoe at once. I will speak to no one; I will not betray you, my poor girl."

A gleam of satisfaction lit up the black eyes.

"I have mademoiselle's promise that she will not disclose what I have said to a living soul!" said Josine.

Floris shook her head with a gesture of scorn, and pointed to the door.

"You have my promise. I—I shall not break it. Go!"

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a merry party at breakfast next morning; the trip to the cascades was a well-known and favorite one, and the young men who had been left behind were delighted at the opportunity which the absence of such great guns as Lord Bruce, and some of the others who had formed the hunting party, gave them of scoring with the ladies.

Floris, as she entered the room in her dark brown habit, was surrounded instantly by an eager cir-

cle, each man of which was anxious to get a word from her.

But Floris could do little more than smile this morning; her heart seemed heavy as lead, strive though she did to get rid of the dread and suspicion that tortured her.

Presently, in the midst of the chatter and laughter which always seemed at its merriest at breakfast-time, the tall, graceful figure of Lady Blanche glided into the room.

At sight of her Floris's heart gave a great leap of relief and satisfaction, for Lady Blanche was in her riding habit, and was evidently going to the cascades, therefore Josine was either mad or had, for some purpose of her own, lied!

With a good deal of boisterousness the young men sallied out of the breakfast-room to the stables to see after the horses, as they said, but in reality to get a chance to smoke the morning cigar.

Floris and Lady Betty went upstairs to put their hats and gloves on, and Josine was nowhere to be found.

At that moment Josine was in Lady Blanche's room, standing with demure eyes and clasped hands before her ladyship.

"All is prepared, miladi," she said, in a low voice. "It was a great trouble, and at one time I thought I should have to give it up in despair. It was so hard to convince mademoiselle that milord could be faithless! He is always so devoted to her, as all the world knows! Ah, yes! it was hard."

Lady Blanche colored, as a pang of jealousy ran through her.

"That will do," she said. "And—and the time?"

"Just after lunch, miladi," said Josine, thoughtfully. "There will be nobody at home; the house will be quite clear for the little comedy, as Mr. Raymond calls it!" and she showed her white teeth.

End of the conversation, miladi?"

Lady Blanche nodded; then, with a sudden pallor and with downcast eyes, she said:

"And are you sure that she will not reveal what passes?"

"I am convinced!" responded Josine, eagerly. "Miladi may rely on it that nothing in this world, will induce her to open her lips! She is too proud, ah! far too proud! rely on that, miladi."

Lady Blanche dismissed her with a nod, then summoned her own maid.

"I shall not go out this morning," she said, quietly. "Please take off this habit and give me a morning gown. When you have done so, take my love to Lady Betty, and tell her that I have received an important letter from Lord Seymour which I must answer. You need not go until the last moment."

On the way to her mistress' room, Josine met a footman with a telegram on a salver.

"Here you are, Miss Josine!" he said: "a telegram for your young lady."

Josine took it and glanced at the direction. It was addressed to Floris.

"Miss Carlisle is no young lady of mine!" she said, showing her teeth, with a spiteful smile. "But I will take it to her, and save your long legs," and with a saucy smile she ran past him.

Outside the door she paused, with the telegram in her hand.

"What is this now?" she muttered. "Something that may spoil our little play, perhaps! A plague on it! Shall I give it to her at once? No! Josine must see it first, at any rate! It will keep, no doubt!" and she thrust it in her pocket.

Then she opened the door, and met Lady Betty's inquiry as to where she had been with a profuse apology.

"Josine, we shall have to part!" said Lady Betty. "Oh, don't trouble now! I have finished, you tire-some girl! You know I can never put my veil on properly! No, you shall not touch it! Go and see if Miss Carlisle wants you!"

Josine went into the adjoining room; Floris was standing before the glass with her hat in her hand, and she shrank back as the girl approached.

"Mademoiselle will not go?" murmured Josine.

"Yes!" said Floris, in a low, stern voice. "I do not believe a word of what you told me last

night. You are a wicked girl, Josine!"

"Ah! we shall see!" muttered Josine, bending her head. "Mademoiselle will wait a moment? Listen!" she added, as Lady Blanche's maid entered the next room.

The next instant Lady Betty called out:

"Floris! Blanche has sent to say that she is not going! She has some letters to write!"

Floris turned deathly pale, and caught the edge of the table.

Josine smiled triumphantly, then went into Lady Betty's room, with her cat-like step.

"Miss Carlisle has a headache, miladi! A bad headache! I do not think, if miladi will pardon me, that mademoiselle ought to go for so long a ride in the hot sun!"

Lady Betty came into Floris' room at once.

"What is the matter, dear? Why, how pale you look!"—with anxious concern—"Are you ill?"

Floris could scarcely speak for a moment.

"I—I have a bad headache," she said, and truthfully enough. "I do not think I will go."

"No, don't," said Lady Betty. "I thought you didn't look well this morning. No, you shall stay at home, and I will stay and sit by you."

"No, no!" said Floris. "Please do not—there is no occasion. I would rather you did not!" with a feverish flush. "I—I shall get some sleep, perhaps. I will not stay unless you go!"

Lady Betty hesitated, and Josine stood watching them both.

"Mademoiselle will be better to be quiet and alone," she said, softly.

"Do you think so, dear? Well, if you would rather I went—"

"I would much rather," faltered Floris.

"Let me get you a draught before I go, then," said Lady Betty, anxiously; and she went and mixed a draught from her medicine chest. "There, dear, take that, and now lie down and get some sleep. Josine, get Miss Carlisle's dressing-gown, and cover her up well. I am sorry, dear. I shan't enjoy myself one bit; I shall be thinking of you all the day."

"Do not think of me," said Floris, with a sigh, as she sank on the bed. Then with a sudden impulse, she put up her arms and twined them around Lady Betty's neck.

"Good-bye," she murmured.

Floris was usually so undemonstrative, that Lady Betty was touched by the simple caress.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, kissing her. "Mind, you are to sleep for quite two hours, and you are not to go into the sun. I shall expect to see you quite yourself when I come back."

And, with a strange reluctance that she remembered afterward, she left her.

Josine stood looking down at Floris' pale face in silence for a moment, then she bent down and whispered:

"Keep a good heart, mademoiselle. Ah, but no man in this world is worth a headache, after all!"

Floris looked at her with a mixture of repugnance and fascination.

"Mademoiselle will remain here until I come for her," said Josine, significantly. "And let mademoiselle console herself that it is better to be undeceived than fooled to the top of one's bent!"

And with this piece of worldly wisdom and comfort she went out.

Reaching her own room, she locked the door, and took the telegram from her pocket. For some minutes she looked at the mean and miserable envelope which the post office authorities deem a sufficient covering for so important a missive as a telegram, bending it this way and that in the endeavor to decipher some words of the contents.

But the pink paper was folded inward, and with a gesture of impatience, she went downstairs and got a jug of hot water.

Then with the patience of a re-Indian, she held the envelope over the steam, until the warmed part had become moist enough to allow her to open the envelope.

With a smile of satisfaction, she drew out the telegram and read it.

And as she read it, her face went pale and grave, and her hand shook till the thin paper trembled like a leaf.

"What shall I do?" she murmured. "It is fortunate or unfortunate, as I choose to make it. If I give it to her now it will spoil all; and yet it is hard to keep it, glancing at the scrawl with hard, glittering eyes. "Bah! I will not give it to her until afterward. It will be time enough, ah, yes, it will be time enough!" and carefully reclosing the envelope, she put back in her pocket.

The morning passed.

How, Floris, lying with a heart torn asunder by conflicting emotions, scarcely knew. All seemed still in the great house. Not one

of the guests, excepting herself and Lady Blanche had remained at home; a stillness like that of a calm before some dreadful storm seemed to lie upon the place; and the pitiless sun that streamed through the blinds fell upon her face with a mocking mercilessness.

At last, when she could lie still no longer, she got up and put on a morning dress, and paced the room.

The great clock chimed the hour or two, and as its echo reverberated through the huge place, the door was opened softly, as Josine entered.

She seemed in a state of suppressed excitement, her thin lips tightly together, her black, beady eyes gleaming like coals.

"Hush!" she whispered, huskily, and putting up a warning finger, for Floris seemed about to cry out. "Do not speak, mademoiselle, but come with me? She has gone downstairs, and he will be here presently."

Josine stole down the stairs, and Floris following her, in the same half-torpid state, found herself in a small hall outside the conservatory.

She recognized it at once as the spot in which she and Lord Norman had discovered Josine hiding. Another coincidence!

Drawing close to her, Josine put her finger to her lips.

"Hush, mademoiselle! Not a word! And remember your promise! Whatever you see you will not betray yourself—or me!"

Floris made a gesture of assent, and Josine, unlocking a door quietly and stealthily, crossed the conservatory, and drawing Floris into a corner, behind the shrubs, pointed to a small room, which led to the conservatory, and was draped at the opening by curtains, partly drawn aside and looped up.

Floris, with the deepest repugnance—which would have been unendurable but that she believed the whole thing to be a farce—looked through the opening, and saw Lady Blanche standing beside a small table.

(To be continued.)

About the Farm

EFFECT OF DIET ON SHEEP.

Everyone who has kept a large flock of sheep must have experienced what are called strokes of bad luck. These misfortunes may occur at any time, but mostly happen at transitional periods of the year or in connection with some crisis in the annual history, of which lambing is the best example. The mysterious nature of these attacks has always been a puzzle to flockmasters, for sheep are hardy creatures when well, and the appearance of the flock may well warrant confidence in their well being. Suddenly a death is reported, which causes no particular surprise or alarm. If, however, such a casualty is succeeded by others of a similar nature, a different feeling is aroused, and the owner and the shepherd are found in close consultation in order to find a cause. Meanwhile the mischief continues, and each morning, or seldomer, fresh deaths or cases are reported, and it soon appears that for some reason or other, the flock has been upset. Inquiries are instituted, perhaps in these columns, intestines are sent up to experts, veterinary assistance is called in, all too often to little purpose. The mischief continues, until it appears to exhaust itself, confidence is gradually restored, and the matter is attributed to those misfortunes which appear to be inseparably connected with the maintenance of a large herd of live stock.

I write entirely from personal experience, with some knowledge of sheep and science; but in such cases neither the one nor the other appears sufficient to stop the mortality, which, be it remarked, is not due to any specific outbreak such as rot, lung trouble, or gid, but seems to be due to a general upset of the digestive system. It is accompanied by diarrhoea, constipation, impaction; and death is followed by frothing of the mouth and enormous distension of the abdomen. It may attack lambs, tegs, or ewes, and appears to be attributable to errors of diet. In some cases death is sudden, a ewe falling down dead at the hay-crib. More often a shepherd leaves animals apparently in good health at night, and finds one or two straggling and blown up in the morning. The master becomes almost afraid to

visit his flock or to ask after them and is daily worried by bad news. Now the best thing he can do, under such difficult circumstances, is to shift his sheep on to entirely new ground and new food, and this measure is often eminently successful, so that the plague is stayed almost immediately. The problem is, however, by no means solved, for in the first instance it was not suspected that anything was wrong in the general management. Hay, roots, cake, and daily outrun are all in accordance with good feeding; but for some reason, more or less occult, the particular food and situation appears to have upset the flock. The difficulty lies in foretelling the mischief, for neither shepherd nor master anticipated it, and it is scarcely likely that anything will be done till something has happened. When, however, the tocsin sounds it is time to act promptly, and the treatment must be in the direction of change of food and situation.

I will next give a few cases in which I have been caught napping and had to bear the brunt of the loss. The first instance occurred in my days of pupilage, when I was a spectator rather than a sufferer. There was sad loss of ewes and lambs under able management, the cause being eventually traced to food. It happened in early spring in mild weather, which caused the turnip greens to shoot and flower, and the cause was, no doubt, too succulent food, containing crude nitrogenous matter (omides), which acted injuriously upon the sheep, upsetting their digestion and poisoning the blood. The second case occurred to myself, and it is noteworthy that it happened during my first year of farming. The previous tenant had allowed his hay to stand till it was too old, probably with the wish to secure as big a block of hay for valuation as possible. In the succeeding spring the turnips ran, and the consequences were innumerable, and imperfectly developed green food. The result was a rapid falling off in condition of the flock, which unfortunately was hidden from me by an accident, which kept me on my back. The result was the death of about sixty ewes and all their lambs, and it was long before the survivors recovered their normal strength. The serious misfortune was entirely due to errors in feeding, and I will pass on to another. Some years ago my ewes were affected with sore teeth, which communicated itself to the lips of the lambs, and the consequence was that the lambs could only suck with pain, and the ewes crouched and stamped when the lambs attempted to approach them. This proved fatal to many ewes and lambs, and was difficult to account for. It, however gradually became apparent that it was caused by a heated state of blood, brought about by diet of clover hay, with an allowance of cotton cake—too albuminous in its character. There was no roots that year, and clover hay, cotton cake and water were too heating. All went on for some weeks, but the heated condition of the blood seemed to fly to the teats and spread to the udders, affecting the lambs as well. Both ewes and lambs, being above ordinary value, made this a serious matter, and was a great trial to the shepherd, who was in excellent spirits during the lambing time, and had a capital "breed" of lambs. On another occasion, when roots were scarce and hay and water was alternative, the ewes became constipated, and when lambing time came many ewes were affected with hemorrhage and several died. This also was attributed to a heated condition of blood, owing to eating much clover hay (i.e., mixed clover and beets), without roots. It they had received meadow hay and a few white turnips the mischief would not have happened. In this connection it may be remarked that the same course of feeding might easily have proved harmless, for these strokes of bad luck appear to be due to a combination of circumstances. If however, a sheep farmer has once experienced a loss, and traced it to such causes as have been mentioned, nothing will persuade him to repeat it. He will hear of others doing the same thing without evil consequence, but his mind is made up. I have known a flockmaster say that he would not allow his flock to walk over a field of swedes before lambing, and, doubtless, he had got reason for his vow. Still, others do so, and think nothing of it, because they have not been bitten—but once bitten, twice shy. Food, no doubt, is a very principal item in sheep management, and is so important that it cannot be dismissed in one short article. I therefore, shall hope to give a few more cases at a future time, bearing upon the vast importance of judicious feeding.—J. W., in Live Stock Journal.