

# Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

## CHAPTER XXII.

In the little drawing-room of the cottage at Westbury Floris sat, with her head bowed upon her hands, looking into the fire.

A silence that could be felt brooded over the house; the old clock on the stairs, whose ticks she could remember as far back as she could remember anything, even that had been hushed by sympathetic hands.

Motionless as a carved figure she sat, the firelight falling fitfully on her pale face, showing like marble over the deep black dress.

A week had passed since she left Ballyfloe and that long night journey, and she was now alone in the world.

To the poor, weak, tired mother the long day of peace and rest had come, and the girl who at this moment needed her more sorely than she had ever needed her, was motherless and solitary.

Alone! alone!  
All day long the word seemed to echo in her benumbed heart, until she longed, like the Psalmist of old, for the white wings of death to bear her to her mother's side.

And yet friends had been very good to her—the friends of her old past girlish life had done their very best, but how poor is the very best that can be done in such an hour!

No sympathy, however tender and thoughtful can lighten the darkness of the hour of bereavement, or take off the keen edge of the great trouble.

One gleam of consolation alone pierced the gloom, and that was the knowledge that she had been in time to see the poor mother before she died—in time to hear her very last words and receive her last blessing.

There had scarcely been time for more than that, and Mrs. Carlisle had died in the full comforting assurance that she should leave Floris with a happy future before her.

Almost her last words had been of Lord Bruce, and her belief that he would make Floris happy; at most her last thoughts had been of the glorious future that awaited her as Countess of Norman.

And Floris could not summon heart to tell her the truth—could not find strength to destroy the comfort the poor dying woman drew from the conviction that her child would be provided for.

And now, as she sat looking into the fire with dry, burning eyes, Floris was thinking of him and the brief happy past.

Through all the week she had been expecting some word from him.

It could not be anything that would not add to her misery, for what could he say that would explain away what she had seen that fateful morning?

But still she had expected and longed for it.

She had thought that he would write one line, perhaps, admitting his guilt and imploring her forgiveness; and she would have sent him her pardon and wished him all happiness.

But no line had come—no, not a single word.

If he had died—if they had both died—the silence between them could not have been more complete!

There was no friendly spirit to tell her that in that moment he was lying between life and death in the vast solitude of the hills, unconscious of anything—ignorant of all that happened to her and to himself!

To her his conduct seemed black as night, black as the sorrow that had befallen her; and in her heart echoed the dreary word, "alone!"

So she sat in the red firelight, letting the hours slip by with weary feet, so lost to the world that when the servant stole in with hushed footsteps and spoke to her, she did not hear her.

The girl came up and touched her with pitying respect.

"A gentleman—Mr. Morrel, miss," she said.

And Mr. Morrel came in.

Floris rose to receive him and held out her white hand.

The little lawyer took it and looked at her with a sympathetic pity, which was so strange an emotion to him that it made him quite embarrassed.

It is to be presumed that even middle-aged attorneys retain a

sense of the beautiful, and the lovely young face, never lovelier than now in its clear pallor, and with the sad, wistful light in the eloquent eyes, touched him deeply.

"I am sorry to intrude at so late an hour, Miss Carlisle," he began; but Floris stopped him with a faint smile.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Morrel. I was getting very—lonely."

"Yes, yes," he said, in his old sharp way. "How well Floris remembered it on the occasion when he came with Lord Norman's offer."

"No doubt—dreadful loss." "For me, yes," said Floris bravely, and with a steadfast look in her eyes; "but not for—for my mother. You were a kind friend to her, Mr. Morrel," she added, with that gentle sweetness which atoned for much of her pride, and was the secret charm which bewitched all who came in contact with her.

"No, no, all in the way of business, Miss Carlisle; nothing more, I assure you," he responded, hurriedly. "Always found your poor mother anxious to avoid giving trouble and—and—might I ring for a light for you?"

"Thanks," said Floris. She had grown so used to the grim darkness that had surrounded her that she had become enamored of it. The girl brought the lamp, and Mr. Morrel sat down and fidgeted with his gloves. Out of respect for Floris he was dressed in mourning and had thought fit to don a hatband which would have been considered deep enough for the loss of his own father.

Floris had asked for some tea, and she gave him a cup now as simply and quietly, almost as cheerfully, as she had done months ago.

There are some proud natures who, like the Spartan boy, will hide the fox that gnaws at their heart, and Floris was one of them.

"Will you take some more sugar? I am sorry there is no cream."

"Don't mention it, Miss Carlisle," he said. Her fortitude amazed him, and pleased him, too, for he was going to try it to its utmost. "When I was here last, Miss Carlisle," he said, coughing and abeming, "I promised to look into the late Mrs. Carlisle's affairs, and—ahem—I have done so."

"Yes?" said Floris. She had sunk into the easy-chair and sat looking at him, her lovely eyes dreamily fixed on his dry, wrinkled and not unkindly face. "Yes, you have been very kind, Mr. Morrel; I do not know what I should have done without you."

"Not at all, not at all!" he said, waving his hand, deprecatingly. "All in the way of business, miss. Only did my duty. I was your father's legal adviser before you were born; in fact, I have had the Carlisle business in my hands ever since I entered the glorious profession of the law."

Floris inclined her head; though her eyes were fixed on his, her thoughts were wandering miles away—to Ballyfloe, to Lady Betty, to Bruce—ah, yes, to Bruce!

"I don't suppose any one knew more of the great lawsuit, Norman vs. Carlisle, than I did," he went on, sipping his tea. "A wonderful lawsuit—and wonderfully—most romantically concluded," and he bowed to Floris.

Her face flushed for a moment at the name of "Norman," then went pale again. Romantically concluded indeed! If he could but have guessed how romantically, even the dry old lawyer as he was would not have been so complacent.

"But to return to the business in hand," he said, with a little cough. "I have been going into the late Mrs. Carlisle's affairs, and I am sorry to say that they have not proved as satisfactory as I could desire, no, not nearly as satisfactory," and he shook his head.

Floris turned her sad, wistful eyes upon him for a moment.

She had no idea as to where his words were drifting.

Since her mother's death there had been one or two interviews, in each of which he had talked and she had listened, but understanding little or nothing.

"I am very sorry," she said, more for his sake than her own.

"Yes, so am I. I had hoped that, upon examination, the estate would have come out pretty flourish-

ishing. It was rather a confused and tangled business—the lawsuit had entailed a great loss, and there were several mortgages; but I had hoped that we should have been able to clear them off—I am afraid I don't make myself plain," he broke off, for Floris' gaze had settled on the fire again, with a far-off expression.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said meekly. "Yes, I understand. You mean that I am not as—rich as you thought I should be?"

He looked at her curiously.

"Exactly; that is what I was trying to convey, Miss Carlisle. The estate has been so much encumbered and entangled that your mother scarcely knew how she really stood."

"Poor mamma!" murmured Floris, slowly.

"And having gone into matters I find that the prospect is not nearly so inviting as it should be," he continued, smoothing out his gloves and frowning at the teacup.

Floris watched him with listless attention.

"To add to our difficulties," he resumed, having arranged his gloves to his satisfaction, "the principal mortgagee has chosen this particular time to foreclose. He could not have chosen a worse, because property is at a very low ebb in the market, and a sale would not do more than realize a half of the money lent. I am afraid I scarcely make myself understood?" "Yes, oh, yes," said Floris, calmly.

But in truth she did not realize all that his legal phraseology implied.

"I have endeavored to persuade him, the principal mortgagee, to waive his claim to foreclosure, but I have not succeeded. He wants the money, and in simple language, Miss Carlisle, he must have it."

"Yes, oh, yes," said Floris again. "Therefore it will be necessary, indeed, inevitable, that the estate should be sold."

"Yes," said Floris. "Please sell it all—all but the cottage. I would like to keep this and live here."

Poor Mr. Morrel coughed and knit his brows.

They say that lawyers always dread having dealings with female clients, they are so long in understanding exactly how the land lies; and certainly Floris was long in understanding.

"But, my dear Miss Carlisle," he said, leaning forward; "I am afraid this cottage must be sold."

It had come at last! Floris sat up and looked at him. "The cottage must be sold! But—but Mr. Morrel, I wish to live here. I wish to live here as—as my mother did!"

He frowned and brushed an imaginary crumb from his coat sleeve.

"I am very sorry, but I am afraid this cottage must be sold, Miss Carlisle. Of course I am aware that, placed as you are, this is merely a matter of arrangement. You are to be, if you are not now, the possessor of immense wealth, and can buy the cottage for yourself."

"I don't understand," said poor Floris slowly.

Mr. Morrel grew desperate.

"In one word, Miss Carlisle, we find that your mother's estate, if sold, will barely pay off the mortgage upon it, and—and that if you were not the betrothed of Lord Norman you would be penniless."

Floris rose, white and calm, dreadfully calm.

"What! What did you say?" she asked, very quietly.

Mr. Morrel, driven into corner, pulled himself together.

"That is the simple English of it, Miss Carlisle," he said. "We find that the liens on the estate are so great that to meet them everything must be sacrificed."

Floris stood, leaning her hand on the table.

"But—but there is my own money!" she said faintly.

Mr. Morrel wagged his head.

It was certainly hard work having to do business with a lady, and a young one, especially.

"You forget, Miss Carlisle, that your own little fortune went in paying the costs of the lawsuit between you and Lord Norman," he replied.

She shuddered at the sound of the name.

"Then—then I am penniless?" she said.

He smiled.

"Well, yes, if you put it as bluntly as that, you are," he said.

"But," and he smiled unctuously, with quiet enjoyment, "that is a small matter to the future Countess of Norman!"

Floris turned deathly pale, but her eyes never left his face.

"Mr. Morrel," she said, quietly and calmly, "you are laboring under a misapprehension. I am not the future Countess of Norman."

"Not—not—not the future—but,

my dear Miss Carlisle, all the world knows of your engagement!"

"All the world knew of it, perhaps," said Floris, steadily, though her eyes wavered and her lips quivered. "But not all the world, it seems, knows that the engagement is broken off."

"Broken off!" he exclaimed, staring through his spectacles aghast at her words. "Do you mean to say, Miss Carlisle, that you are not engaged to marry Lord Norman?"

Floris shook her head. His amazement and consternation almost amused her.

"Yes," she said, "the engagement is broken off, Mr. Morrel. You must not take Lord Norman into your calculations."

"But that is just what I have been doing!" he said, stolidly. "I was under the impression that you were betrothed to the earl, and that—that in short—good Heavens, my dear young lady, how did this happen?" and the poor man rubbed his knees in a state as nearly approaching agitation as a lawyer permits himself.

In despair and misery Floris laughed, actually laughed.

"What does it matter?" she said. "Results are all you lawyers care for, Mr. Morrel, and I have given you the result. There is no engagement between Lord Norman and myself. It ceased before—before my mother's death."

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Dear me! good gracious! Then—then you are actually penniless!" She smiled.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said, so calmly that he stared at her. "It sounds very dreadful, but I suppose it is not so bad as it sounds."

(To be continued.)

## About the Farm

### FALL CALVES.

Fall calves can be more profitably raised than those dropped in the spring, according to reports from the Irish Department of Agriculture. When it is considered that the mortality of calves is greater in summer than in winter the figures for the South of Ireland being 9 per cent. and 0.5 per cent. respectively, a substantial inducement is held out to breed more fall calves. This success with winter-raised calves may not be duplicated in this county yet it is common observation that flies and heat do the spring calves a lot of damage, and its frequent neglect during the first winter just after weaning proves a distinct loss to its feeders. Fall calves suffer less from flies and make good use of the grass, suffering little inconvenience from the withdrawal of milk in the spring. During their first winter, they have the support of the milk and by the next winter they can shift for themselves far better than can the freshly weaned spring calf.

Now that far-sighted dairymen are becoming impressed with the improvement in quality of their herds to be secured by saving home-bred heifers, the subject of winter calf-raising is engaging their attention. Winter high prices for milk and its products induce increasing numbers of dairymen to freshen their cows in the fall, as they have found that the silo goes far toward reducing the cost of production so as to leave much of the extra milk receipts for profit.

Winter-raised calves are a success and less costly than those nursed on grass-made milk. Their production fits in well with the plans of dairymen who are alive at once to the profits from winter dairying with the aid of a silo the difficulty of buying springers of good quality and the certain increase in milking capacity in herds replenished by well-sired home-grown heifers.—Breeder's Gazette.

### HENS THAT EAT EGGS.

The Michigan Poultry Breeder says that at this period of the year some of the hens will be guilty of eating their eggs, and it is one of the most annoying vices that can exist in a flock. It is a habit that is acquired, one hen becoming addicted to it and teaching the others. Hens will never eat their eggs, however, unless induced to do so from some cause. If fresh shells are given them or an egg becomes broken, they learn that they have a source of food, and take advantage of their opportunity.

The vice cannot be cured; that is, if the hens once begin to eat eggs they will always do so if they can. The best remedy, however, is to get rid of them; begin with a new flock.

By arranging the nests egg-eating may be sometimes prevented, but does not destroy the desire. Get a soap box with a top and compel the hen to go into the box for a nest at the end, so as to compel her to walk in. The box should be just large enough for her to sit in, and not stand up comfortably. Fix the nest ten inches from the floor, or so she cannot stand on the floor and eat the egg out of the box. If she cannot stand in the box she will not attempt to eat the egg when on the nest.

### FAST BEFORE KILLING.

A surprisingly large quantity of poultry coming to market is not fasted before killing and often arrives with crops full of food and protruding. This distended crop is decidedly unsightly and perceptibly lowers the appearance of the birds. Why will not people learn that a bird's crop gorged with food is a handicap to its sale? Moreover it distinctly lowers the quality of the flesh as well. It has been demonstrated that the flesh of poultry that fasts for from twenty-four to thirty-six hours before killing is more delicate of flavor and of better keeping quality than those which have food in process of digestion at time of killing. The digestive process carries with it certain ferments that affect the flavor of the flesh.

### SPRING OR FALL CALVES.

The question as to whether the calf should come in the fall or in the spring is to be determined by the comparative profit of the summer's or winter's market. The winter's milk cost more money, but it brings more. It costs more in feed, in shelter, and about the same in labor, and the relative price of milk fed must determine whether the calf shall come in the fall or in the spring. As farmers settle down to dairying as a business they will more and more aim to make it an all-the-year-round business, and hence will have calves coming all the year around, with a greater proportion of fall calves than heretofore. This will give creameries permanent work which is essential to their profit, and will bring dairying down more and more to a legitimate and profitable business all the year around.

### AN AERIAL COSTUME.

Designed for Women Who Wish to Navigate the Air.

A London firm has already designed and had made what it calls an aerial costume; in other words, a dress to be worn by women aeronauts. It is of the best sheepskin in a beautiful dull raisin red, though of course any other color could be chosen.

The coat is cut to come just below the hip line, says the Queen, buttons down the front and is close fitting. The buttons are of natural colored horn; but here again a wide diversity is possible, for these horn buttons are now to be had in any color to match the leathers.

The sleeves are caught in at the wrist with an elastic band and over these long stiffened gauntlet gloves are to be worn. The coat is lined throughout with a soft thick camel fleece in the natural color. The divided skirt is extremely full and is lined with satin and caught at the knee into fairly wide bands which go under the high boots.

For headwear the newest type of motor bonnet is the style suggested. It is of the cottage shape, composed of leather to match the suit, and has rather a deep front, which is lined with ruched satin and generally worn folded back in front a few inches. It can, however, be turned forward when necessary and makes a capital shade for the eyes from the sun. At the neck the bonnet is put into a deep sort of shaped collar which buttons over with two small horn buttons at one side of the front.

The whole effect of the outfit is neat and smart in the extreme, yet the pretty and becoming bonnet gives it a picturesque appearance. The entire thing is designed to be thoroughly practical and comfortable and to take up as little room and impede the movements as little as possible.

Moreover, it is quite airtight, and owing to the way in which the collar on the bonnet overlaps that on the coat, the gauntlets cover the lower sleeve and the high boots come over the bands of the divided skirt at the knee there is not a crevice where the wind can slip in, as it would certainly be apt to do when one is whistling through the air at the rate of a mile a minute.

When a man begins to blow in his money a lot of people get wind of it.