

# Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Lady Betty was waiting for her in the sitting-room, waiting in the greatest agitation and distress, mingled with her joy for the news.

"Oh, Blanche, is he really better?" she exclaimed, forgetting her animosity for the moment.

"Yes," said Lady Blanche, curtly; "he is better, but his life hangs by a thread—I know that. I have come to ask you what you intend to do."

"To do?"

"Yes. Do you mean to see him? If you do, he will see by your face that something is wrong; he will ask you questions about—about Floris Carlisle. And what will you say? Can you keep your countenance and lie, as I have done? I have told him that she is resting."

"Oh, how could you do that?" Lady Blanche laughed. It was an awful laugh, and it made her listener shudder.

"I would tell him anything to avert the blow! It must come sooner or later, but unless you want to kill him, let it come later."

"It is dreadful!" moaned Lady Betty. "I cannot understand it. I will never believe she has done what you say."

"Jilted him and ran off with Bertie Clifford?" said Lady Blanche, icily. "I admire your faith. I suppose you have written to her?"

"I wrote her before I left Ballyfloe," said Lady Betty. "I wrote to Westbury, where her mother lived. I wrote to Matilda, who first recommended her to me when she came as a companion, but I have received no answer."

Lady Blanche smiled. She knew that Josine had taken the letters from the postbag.

"How could you have received any answer, seeing that Floris Carlisle has gone with Bertie Clifford, and that Lady Matilda is on the Continent?" she said, contemptuously.

"What shall I do?" demanded poor Lady Betty, helplessly.

"Go back to Ballyfloe," said Lady Blanche, firmly. "He does not know you are here. Go back to Ballyfloe, and I will tell him that you would not see him for fear of exciting him, and that you have taken Floris Carlisle with you."

"Yes, I will go," said Lady Betty. "I will go at once. Poor Bruce, poor Bruce!"

Lady Blanche's face flushed.

"Save your pity for those who need it," she said, quietly. "Poor Bruce," as you call him, is a fortunate man to have been deceived before marriage, instead of afterward," and, with this last dagger thrust, she left her.

From that moment Lord Norman's recovery was rapid. At the end of the week a comfortable, the most comfortable of the Ballyfloe travelling carriages, filled with every luxury a convalescent could require, arrived at Scarfross, and to his immense satisfaction, he started for "home" as he called it.

They started early in the morning. Lord Norman and the young doctor travelling in the big carriage, and the rest of the party travelling as best they liked.

They arrived at Ballyfloe at dusk, and were greeted by Lady and Sir Joseph Lynch with the most cordial and affectionate welcome. It was quite a reception, in fact, all the guests who remained thronging the terrace and pressing forward to express their delight at seeing him among them again.

Lord Norman, as he shook hands and responded to their kind expressions, kept glancing to the right and left and beyond them to the hall door, with barely suppressed eagerness.

"Where is Floris?" he asked, quite audibly, of Lady Lynch.

Before she could answer, Lady Blanche laid her hand softly on his arm.

"Bruce, Dr. Greene says you are to go in at once; the air is chilly for you."

He laughed grimly.

"You see, Lady Lynch, they intend to treat me as an invalid still, and I suppose I must bow beneath their tyranny! I shall see you at dinner."

"Better dine in your own room to-night, Norman, I think," said Dr. Greene. "You have done quite enough for to-day."

They escorted him to his apart-

ments almost as if he were a royal personage, and Lady Blanche went to her own room. As she opened the door, she saw Josine standing waiting for her.

Lady Blanche started and flushed, then she closed the door.

"Is there any news, Josine?" she asked, calmly. Josine shook her head.

"No, miladi."

"She—she has not written?"

"No, miladi, there have been no letters. If there had been, I would have intercepted them and given them to miladi."

Lady Blanche drew a breath of relief.

"Then—then you have heard nothing?" she faltered.

"Nothing of Miss Carlisle! Nothing whatever. I know nothing except that Miss Carlisle left Ballyfloe with Milord Clifford," she said, steadily.

Lady Blanche dismissed her with a wave of her hand, and sank into a chair.

She knew that Lord Norman would send for her presently, and in a few minutes his valet knocked at the door and begged her to come to his master.

She rose, glanced at her face in the glass, and followed the man. The critical moment had arrived.

Lord Norman was pacing up and down the room impatiently; his travelling cloak of sable was thrown across a chair, as if he had but just flung it off, and he had made no attempt at changing his clothes.

"Blanche," he said, facing her, "why doesn't Floris come? Where is she? Why is it that no one mentions her name? Is she in the house? She must be at this hour. I asked my man if she were dressing for dinner, but I could get no satisfactory answer from him."

Lady Blanche was silent; she could not speak for the moment—could not take her eyes from his, in which already there began to dawn an overpowering anxiety and apprehension.

"Blanche!" he exclaimed; "what does this mean? Is she ill? For Heaven's sake, if you have any news to tell me, tell me it at once. Suspense kills me—what is it?"

She moistened her lips.

"Floris is not at Ballyfloe, Bruce."

"Not at Ballyfloe!" he repeated with wide-opened eyes and knit brow. "Where is she, then? Great heavens! Why didn't you tell me before I left Scarfross? I could have taken train at a nearer point than this. You know I am dying to see her!"

Her heart hardened, and she met his impatient gaze steadily.

"I do not know where she is, Bruce," she said, quietly.

"Not know! What do you mean? When did she go and why?"

"She left Ballyfloe nearly three weeks ago, Bruce—the day you started for Scarfross."

"What!" he cried, in a terrible voice; "what—where? I have had no letter! Ah, I see—you have kept it from me because I was ill. I see—I see! But for Heaven's sake, give it to me now—give them all to me—" and he held out his hand.

She shook her head.

"I have no letter for you, Bruce; she has written to no one."

His hand fell to his side.

"Written to no one, Blanche!" his face growing white. "What is this infernal mystery? Why did you lie to me the other day, and tell me she was at Scarfross? Has she not been there at all?"

"She has not been there, Bruce. She left here when you did, and we have not heard a word from her since."

He strode forward and seized her arm.

"Quick! tell me all. She is dead! I know it! I can read it in your face! Quick, tell me!"

"No, Bruce she is not dead that I know of—indeed I do not know. But—but—oh, Bruce, can you bear it?" she whispered.

"I can bear anything better than this suspense," he cried, hoarsely. "Don't you see it's maddening me?"

"Oh, Bruce Bruce!" she moaned. "It is so hard for me to have to tell you! But you will hear it from me best! Bruce, be firm; be brave! Don't look at me so, or I cannot go on!" for his eyes seemed penetrating to her soul.

He looked aside and motioned to her to go on.

"Bruce," she whispered, almost inaudibly, for her heart nearly stood still with fear, with actual fear that when her lips formed the words he should strike, perhaps kill her. "Bruce, Floris Carlisle is not worth a thought from you! She is a bad, wicked girl—"

"What!" and he laughed a short, wild laugh of mockery. "Go on, go on! You are mad! Floris is what?"

"Judge for yourself!" she retorted, stung into courage. "Floris Carlisle has jilted you, Bruce, and run off with Bertie Clifford."

He looked at her with a dull, perplexed gaze.

"Is this an elaborate joke, Blanche?" he asked, quietly; then a he scanned her face his grasp on her arm grew tighter, and he drew her to him so that she thought he was going to kill her.

"What do you say! Say it again—say it again! I didn't hear you—I could not have heard you. I must be delirious still! Floris—Floris!—well, can't you speak?" he said harshly.

"Bruce, it is quite true! Would to Heaven it were not! She has left you, Bruce! She has gone of with Bertie Clifford!"

He dropped her arm and stepped back, then he looked at her calmly, quietly.

"It must be a lie!" he whispered, huskily, just as Floris had whispered to Josine a fortnight ago!

She shook her head.

"It is the truth, Bruce!"

"How do you know? She has not written; she has—oh, Heaven! am I awake or dreaming? Blanche, for Heaven's sake, tell me all! I know there is some hideous mistake—of course there is some mistake, and it must be put right at once. But tell me all—don't waste a moment! Now—now!"

"Bruce, I can only tell you what I know. The day you left she received a telegram; she started for the railway station at once, and there she met Bertie Clifford."

"A lie!—a lie!" he groaned.

"Bruce, it is no idle scandal. Josine saw them go off together."

"Josine Josine! Who is Josine?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Lady Betty's maid—a great friend of Floris'."

"Fetch her!—fetch Lady Betty!" he said, pointing to the door.

Lady Blanche went out—she was glad to get out, if even for a moment or two, from the sight of his face, the sound of his voice.

In five minutes she returned with the two others.

He was still sitting in the chair, looking vaguely, vacantly out of the window.

"Oh, Bruce!" sobbed poor Lady Betty, going to him; but he kept her back with upheld hand.

"Girl," he said, sternly. "tell me what this means! Speak the truth, if you can, or by Heaven—!"

His glance was terrible, and even Josine quaked; but she had gone too far to draw back.

"Milord, I know nothing but this," she said in a low, steady voice—and she repeated her lesson.

For certainty Miss Carlisle had left Ballyfloe with Lord Clifford.

"And you—do you believe this?" he demanded, turning to Lady Betty.

"What can I do, Bruce?" she wailed. "It is true; I have seen the porter, the guard, and—and—"

"Have you received no letter?" he asked.

Lady Betty shook her head.

"No, Bruce, not a word. I have written to her begging her to relieve us of this terrible suspense with one word, but she has not sent it."

"Go!" he said pointing to the door, and the two went out, leaving Lady Blanche standing there with her hand before her eyes.

She stood thus for a moment or two, then she ventured to look at him.

He was sitting in his chair still, his face turned from her.

She went up to him and knelt beside him.

"Bruce—dear, dear Bruce—be brave. Oh, Bruce! she is not worth it, she is not, indeed!"

He turned his head, and she started and shrank back.

His face was deathly white to the lips his eyes filled with a despair that seemed to have transformed him into an old man.

For a moment he appeared unable to speak, then he put his hand on her shoulder.

"Blanche," he said, hoarsely, almost inaudibly, as the voice of a man at death's door, "you can do me no good! Leave me to myself!"

"But—but—" she cast a quick fearful glance round the room; his pistol case stood on a side table, and there was despair, frenzy on his face.

He smiled an awful smile.

"No Blanche, do not be afraid! I shall not do that. Will you go now?"

She got up slowly. She longed, with a longing past expression, to throw her arms round him, to pour out the passionate love of her heart at his feet, to remind him that there was still one who was faithful, but she dared not, dared not!

She had gone to the length of her tether for the present; for the future—well it lay in the hands of the gods!

Slowly she retreated from him, and left him, left him still sitting with his head bowed, and the awful look in his gray eyes.

His valet found him still sitting there, when he entered an hour afterward, and was dismissed with a gesture; he found him still sitting, like a figure carved in stone, in the morning, and ventured to touch and speak to him.

At the touch Lord Norman looked up at him vaguely; then rose, rose with the stiff movement and gait of extreme age.

"We start for London by the first train," he said, in a hollow voice.

The man packed the portmanteau, and they started in the early morning almost like thieves, for Lord Norman had bidden him keep their departure secret.

They reached London in the evening, and the whole of the night Lord Norman sat in his room, as he sat at Ballyfloe, his eyes fixed on the ground, his gray face set into a marble calm.

In the morning he went to his solicitor's and obtaining the address of Mr. Morrel, drove to his office.

Mr. Morrel was considerably startled at the apparition, as he almost deemed it, of the once handsome, light-hearted earl against whom he had fought so long.

"I—I am afraid you are ill, my lord!" he said, with his nervous sharpness.

Lord Norman waved all commonplace greetings aside.

"I have come to learn what you know of—of Miss Carlisle!" he said sternly.

Mr. Morrel flushed. He felt a strong temptation to answer at once, and tell all, but he had given his promise, and he was a lawyer.

"Be seated, my lord," he said.

Lord Norman declined the chair.

"I ask you for Miss Carlisle's present address," he said, with a terribly significant calmness.

Mr. Morrel shook his head.

"I deeply regret, my lord, that I am unable to furnish you with Miss Carlisle's address," he said, gravely.

"Do you know it?"

"Yes, my lord; I know it."

"And you withhold it at her request?" he demanded, his dark eyes gleaming from his white face.

"I do, my lord. I gave Miss Carlisle my solemn promise that I would keep her whereabouts a secret. It is with the deepest regret—"

Lord Norman took up his hat and went to the door, then he paused, and facing round, looked steadily into the lawyer's nervous and embarrassed countenance.

"You can communicate with Miss Carlisle, I presume?"

"Certainly, my lord. I shall be happy to forward any message—"

"Tell her, please," he said, in a low, clear voice, "that she has nothing to fear from me; but if she should chance to cross my path I will shoot him as I would a dog! That is all!" and he slowly turned and went out.

Mr. Morrel gasped for breath for a moment.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "Tut, tut! That is it, is it! Now who would have thought it of such a quiet, beautiful girl? Tut, tut! But as to giving her his message—no, no, really I think it would be better to say nothing about him. Dear me! dear me! Looked half mad! Tut, tut! I can understand now why she insisted upon changing her name! Poor girl! I wonder what the rights of the story are, after all? Shoot him—who is 'him,' now—like a dog! No, no, my lord, I can't send such a message as that!"

And so good little Mr. Morrel decided to say nothing about Lord Norman's visit, and thus another opening door was closed against Floris' good angel!

(To be continued.)

## TIME BY "MOONS."

Time is calculated among the Indians by moons instead of months. "We" is the Indian for moon. January is called "We-ted-i," "the hard moon"; February, the "raccoon moon"; March, "soreeye moon"; April, "the moon in which geese lay eggs"; May, "the planting moon"; June, "the moon when the strawberries are red"; July, "the moon when chokecherries are ripe"; August, "the harvest moon"; September, "the moon when rice is laid up to dry"; October, "the rice drying moon"; November, "the deer-killing moon," and December, "the deer moon."

## On the Farm

### WHITEWASH COW STABLES.

Whitewashing the cow stable should be one of the regular chores every fall on farms where cows are milked. In the neighborhood of some cities, milkmen who supply milk, are required to have their stables whitewashed with lime each year. What they are compelled to do it should be well for every farmer to perform of their own free will. Whitewashing with lime sweetens the stable and adds to the satisfaction and self-respect of the farmer. The following directions for preparing whitewash are taken from a bulletin for the Illinois Experiment Station:

"Take a half bushel unslaked lime of good quality, slack it with boiling water (cold will do) cover during the process to keep in steam, and add water as the process goes on. To do this, the lime should be placed in a tight barrel and water enough added to partly cover the lime. Never cover the lime entirely with water, else the slaking process will go on too slowly. Soon after the water is added, the lumps of lime which are exposed to both air and water begin to crumble and soon the whole mass begins to steam. More water should be added and the barrel kept covered. After the slaking process is over, several pails of water should be added, and the whole thoroughly stirred. This mixture should be strained through a fine sieve before placing in the barrel to which the pump is attached, and, if necessary, more water may be added to secure a mixture which the nozzle will deliver well. The contents of the barrel or bucket must be kept well agitated, for the lime tends to settle upon the bottom. The spray must be fine, and not allowed to play upon one place until the wash begins to run. When applied with brushes, a slightly heavier wash can be used as it is generally well rubbed down. Light coats frequently applied are better than heavy ones, as the latter are more apt to scale off. While still wet a light coat seems to have failed in its object, but when dry the whole becomes perfectly white. One bushel of lime will make thirty gallons of whitewash. Many formulas for making whitewash are published involving the use of salt, oil, grease, glue, rice, etc., together with the boiling of the material at different stages of its preparation. These are too much involved for the ordinary man, besides taking too much time. The addition of a small quantity of salt and oil is said to increase the life of the whitewash. If convenient, they should be added, but boiling is not essential where light coats are put on often as indicated above. When once understood whitewash can be made and applied with little trouble, yielding a large return in the improved condition of the stable. Best satisfaction is obtained by keeping the mixture well agitated and making applications."

Notwithstanding the author's criticism of more elaborate whitewash mixtures, we venture to suggest, on the strength of our own experience, that a much better whitewash, one that will stick and not rub off, and that is very easily brushed on, even over rough-board surfaces, is prepared as follows:

Take one-half bushel of lime, slake with boiling water, make into a milk, and strain through a fine sieve. Add to this a peck of salt, dissolved in warm water; three pounds ground rice boiled to a paste and stirred in while hot, half pound whiting and one pound glue, previously dissolved in a glue pot, over a slow fire. To this mixture, add five gallons of hot water, stir it well, cover, and let stand for a few days. This mixture is best applied hot, with a brush, and a pint will cover a square yard.

### SCRATCHING FOR HENS.

How many at this time of year stop to think how necessary it is to provide a supply of scratching material for the hens during the winter months. How few take advantage of the opportunities that are presented from now until snow comes of harvesting a supply.

Buckwheat is an easy crop to raise. It requires very little fertilizer, a thin coating of wood ashes will answer, and it grows and thrives upon land newly broken up. The crop ripens in a few months and can be harvested and stored away with or without threshing. As litter it wears well and the fowls find much pleasure in picking off the kernels of grain.