

A LOST WIFE

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A NOVEL.

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BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON,
Author of "Worth Winning," Etc.

(CONTINUED).

I was sick of governess offices and agencies; I would go to them no more. I would go into a shop or into a hospital and offer myself as a housemaid. I thought—anything to escape from Aunt Selina's charity, and to eat the bread of dependence no more.

I wandered along aimlessly and miserably in the damp foggy air, until chance brought my wandering footsteps into Pall Mall. Here suddenly my passage was arrested by a small crowd collected on the pavement which blocked the way. There were the usual ingredients—a tall policeman in the middle, a red-faced, noisy-voiced cabman haranguing and swearing, and a small, weeping woman, whom the engine of the law was grasping firmly by the arm, whilst a group of idlers, dirty men and lounging errand-boys, had crowded close round, eager to hear what it was all about.

"I tell ye I wants my money, and I will have it, or I'll know the reason why!" shouted the cabman, brandishing his fist within six inches of the woman's face.

"But how can I pay you if I've lost my purse?" sobbed the woman.

"You had better come along with me, my dear," was the only solution suggested by the maker of peace.

I don't know what irresistible impulse made me suddenly stop short and listen to what was going on.

"She's drunk, that's what she is!" suggested a bystander; and indeed it did not look unlike it, for the woman, whose face was hidden in her handkerchief, was swaying herself backwards and forwards as if in a paroxysm of grief.

This being a reasonable, if not an original, solution of the situation, appeared to find favor in the minds of the bystanders; there was a murmur of assent among the crowd. The cabman, a rough and brutal-looking specimen of his class, instantly took up the popular cry.

"Yes, that's what it is, she's drunk! She's led me a pretty dance up to Regent's Park Barracks"—there was a grin at this—"then into the City, then back again here, and then tells me at the end she can't pay me 'cos she's lost her purse, and won't tell me her address neither, for me to take her there and get paid."

I don't know why, but at this description of the circuitous route along which the unhappy cabman had been dragged by his fare I pressed in closer, and looked and listened more attentively. I observed that we stood right in front of the Army and Navy Club.

Something in the slight weeping figure struck me as familiar. Surely I had seen her before.

Suddenly she lifted her face, pale and tear-stained.

"Man," she said, solemnly addressing the cabman, "have you no heart at all? I would pay you if I could, but if I haven't the money, why can't you be charitable for once, and let me off? It won't hurt you in the next world to have done a kind action. And I tell you I am very unhappy and very unfortunate. I have lost my purse, and everything—everything!" she added, gloomily.

Imagine what effect such a tragical appeal was likely to have on the typical London "cabby," defrauded of his fare!

But help was at hand for her, for I had recognized her. The pale, sorrowful-faced, dark-eyed little woman who had taken refuge at Sloperton in a thunder-shower, and had given me such a piteous insight into her broken-hearted life. It was she.

"Here," I cried out, addressing the policeman, "I know this lady; it is all right; I will pay the cabman."

In an instant way was made for me; the policeman touched his hat civilly, and "cabby," seeing that his hour for triumph was come, instantly demanded ten-and-six.

It was probably nearly twice as much as he was lawfully entitled to.

but I was not inclined for further wrangling—a fact doubtless upon which he had counted. I paid him without a word, and tucking the little trembling woman's arm under my own, I led her away rapidly out of the crowd down a side street.

We had walked a hundred yards or more before either of us spoke; then suddenly she glanced shyly up into my face.

"I remember you; you are Miss Clifford, and I took shelter in your house in a shower of rain about four months ago."

"Yes," I answered, "I remember it

perfectly; that is why I came forward to-day to help you. I am glad I happened to be passing. How came you to lose your purse?"

"Dropped it, I suppose," she answered, carelessly, as though the fact were not worth consideration; and then she suddenly stopped short and caught my hands. "Are you a happy woman?" she asked me, with a sudden eagerness.

"Not very, I fear," I answered, smiling a little at so strange and unexpected a question.

"Well, then, never mind; you will be some day. Doesn't it say in the Bible that 'those who care for the friendless and the stranger are blessed'?" Well, you have cared for the stranger, and I tell you God will make you happy some day. But as for that cabman, he will be cursed—cursed!" she repeated, furiously, clenched her fists; then seeing that I looked slightly shocked at the strength and bitterness of her malediction, she added lightly: "Ah, I believe in my Bible, I do! You good people don't read it so much as I do, or you would know better; it always comes true, the Bible does."

We walked on again. I began to be puzzled by my strange companion.

"Why were you crying?" I asked her. "Was it because you lost your purse?"

"Purse? What does a purse matter? Oh, no; it was only because I am foiled again, and the man frightened me so, and the crowd."

"Why did you not let him drive you home, and pay him then?" I asked.

"What! for Barbara to find out that I had gone out in a cab by myself? No thank you! As it is, I expect she will guess I have been out, and shan't I be scolded! But I shan't say where I have been, and you will never tell of me, I know."

"Who is Barbara?" I asked.

"Oh, don't you know? She is my sister."

"No, you forget I don't even know her name. Won't you tell it me?"

She looked up at me slyly, almost cunningly, and was silent a minute before she answered in these strange words:

"I shall not tell you more than Barbara would. After all, you are only a stranger, though I like you. My name? Oh, yes, my name is Ellinor Fairbank—Ellinor, that is what I am called."

We had reached by this time a quiet street north of Oxford street. Here she turned round to bid me good-bye.

"Don't come any further; this is our street, where we have lodgings, at least, for a week. Barbara, you know, has gone to Shoolbred's shopping, or I could not have got out. I promised her I wouldn't move; if she is in she will scold me finely."

She gave me her hand, and I wished her good-bye; then suddenly she turned back, and running up to me, whispered in my ear:

"You shall hear more of me soon—very soon."

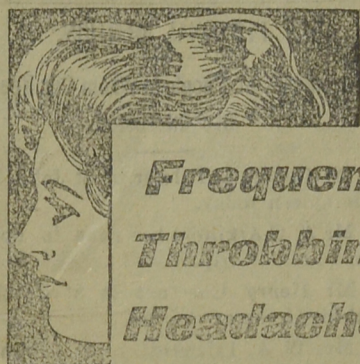
CHAPTER XXII.

"If this should meet the eye of the lady who, on Tuesday morning last, paid a cab fare to a young lady who had lost her purse, and walked home with her afterwards, she is earnestly requested to meet a relative of the young lady whom she assisted, between twelve to half-past twelve o'clock any morning this week, in front of St. Marylebone Church."

This was the advertisement which I had stumbled across in the "agency column" of The Times about two days after my adventure with Ellinor Fairbank.

Behold me, therefore, at twelve o'clock one cold winter morning, pacing up and down the short space in the Marylebone Road which is opposite the church. I was telling myself that I was rather a fool for my pains for coming there. The "relative" meant, of course, Sister Barbara; and if she was to turn out as queer and eccentric a being as her sister, I might possibly be amused, but I could scarcely be benefited by the interview. Besides, what could she possibly want with me? It was probably only a laudable desire on her part to repay me the ten shillings and sixpence which I had expended in her sister's service, but poor as I was, I did not wish to be repaid; it was a pleasure to me to have done my little deed of charity towards one even more miserable, apparently, than myself, and I had no wish to be paid by the sensitive pride of her relatives.

Ten minutes past twelve and no signs of anybody who looked likely



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Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets clear the complexion and sweeten the breath.

to be my unknown friend. I glanced up at the clock, and was mentally determining to give up my wild-goose chase and go home, when a voice close beside me suddenly addressed me:

"I think you must be Miss Clifford?" I turned sharply round, and found myself face to face with a short, dark-eyed woman, of about five-and-forty. She was simply but handsomely dressed in black, and had small pointed features, and a shrewd, and clever, but somewhat stern face.

"Yes, my name is Clifford, and you are Miss Fairbank?"

"Yes, Barbara Fairbank. Will you mind coming in here, and talking to me?" She turned in at the gate of the church, and we began walking up and down the space which is inclosed by the iron railings in front of it.

"I have to thank you for your very great kindness to my poor young sister."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Druggist—This morning he sold a wild eyed woman a dose of poison and trusted her for the money.

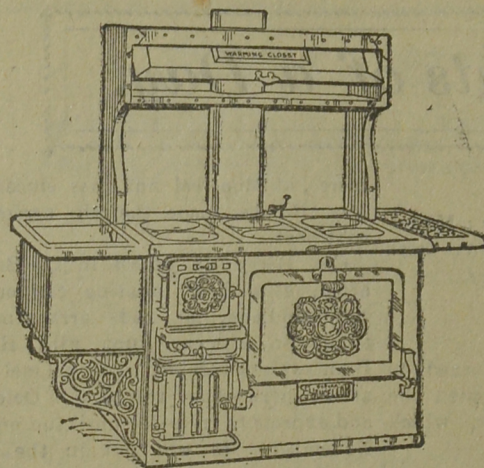
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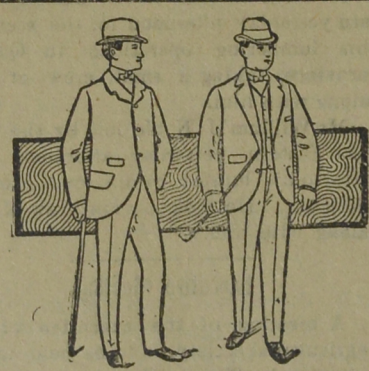
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