

The Woman in Chains

By Sarah B. Smith

“Literature” Publishers
M. M. Hershenson Distributor
Copyright 1919

Translation by Dan Setzer
Copyright © January 2018

The First Bell

She quickly set the little child down from her arms, with one hand she tenderly covered the child, and in the other hand she held high the thick envelope which the postman had just given her.

The four-year-old boy forcefully reached for the envelope in her hand, and she held her hand higher. He cried, "Give me, give me the stamps!"

And Freda Gilbert, whose rough hands were now shaking noticeably, and whose heart was pounding, her face was pale from the curiosity, but she had to control it. And with the patience of a mother, she started to carefully remove the stamps and give them to the child.

Finally the child was happy, and she quickly opened the envelope.

From among the big packet's papers covered with dense handwriting, a bundle of gray paper fell into her lap:

"My dear Frieda Sherman-Gilbert!

"It took me quite a while until I remembered who Frieda Gilbert was. You see, I still think of you as the very dear Ms. Sherman!

"But as soon as I remembered, I quickly read your manuscript. This time I was not negligent, and shoved it into a drawer of my desk like I do with the others who have to wait for months for my answer (I am ashamed of myself).

"I am very sorry, but I am forced to send your short stories back to you. The ideas, the material are very, very good, but it lacks life! It lacks the true, raucous movement of life.

"And I don't understand you, my very dear Frieda. What have you done in the five years since I last saw you? She who was so sharp-minded, with such a clear vision of life, she whose conversation was so interesting, who wrote about important matters, full of dead people, and whose writing pulled us in.

"Listen girl, I am very disappointed. In those years when I used to talk often with you, I was certain that when you, with your clear view of life, would write something it would be very good. Where is that clear vision now? Has the great joy of your married life extinguished that vision?

"I know nothing about you now, but if you have time and the energy, rewrite your stories. Do it multiple times, and I am certain that your previous sharp vision will show itself.

"However, if you are very much in need of the money, send them back to me. I will try to improve them and see if my magazine will buy them from you, and pay you well.

"Stay in contact and send me a detailed letter about yourself and about your current situation.

"Your old friend, Herold L. Wilman"

With a sober expression, Frieda looked at the thick packet of densely covered pages which she now

took out of the envelope. Her own handwriting, and her lips sputtered, "I knew it."

And when she read the letter again, this time she gave a short, bitter laugh, for example where he wrote: "What have you done in the five years since I last saw you?"

"My G-d, what have I done?!" thought Frieda with great bitterness. "I cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner, washed dishes, mended socks, washed sheets, sewed clothes, bathed the children, nursed them through serious illnesses, cleaned the house, occasionally made a puffed-up man happy, controlled my nerves until they became hardened steel, until I forgot everything! Oh, dear friend! If I were to write you everything that *I* have done in the last five years, then you would see life, raucous life, the way it is in reality!"

The little child on the divan cried, with a choking sound. When a frightened Frieda ran to the child she found that the baby had a big piece of the blanket in its mouth.

She sat the little girl up, and glanced at her son while he played with the postage stamps. She picked up the gray letter again and sank deeply back into her thoughts.

Unwillingly, she started to compare what the last five years had done for her life, and for other friends and acquaintances.

For example her old friend Wilman: When Frieda was the secretary for the director N. ____, Wilman was a very unappreciated writer. No one understood him. People laughed at his curious ideas at his worn clothes, and at his stories. Frieda thought well of him and felt sorry for him. Between the older man and the young woman a warm friendship grew. Later Wilman wrote a certain thing, that was greatly enjoyed by a certain publisher. He gained fame, and now is the director of a fine magazine.

Who else? Helen Relnick, once Frieda's best friend, and now a very popular writer. And the illustrator, M., everyone laughed at him. Frieda had to loan him a dollar every week until payday, and sometimes buy him a coffee. She felt sorry for him, and now his illustrations are published in the best magazines!

And one after another Frieda's successful friends passed before her eyes. They seemed to taunt her, "What have you done, what, clever girl?"

Frieda frightened herself, this rebellious feeling was unknown to her, which, she had for a long, long time suppressed. It seemed to her that she heard the call of a bell, and a chill ran through her