

this is really in a measure "selfishness," for we have the living to think of, and this world requires action. There are others who become adamant—it kills them. I don't mean that it actually quenches the vital spark of life itself, but hardens the heart, deadens the brain, numbs the senses, and stagnates all the sensibilities. With regard to myself, I can't say that it actually had that effect, but it certainly changed me wonderfully.

It was some time before I awoke to the truth. Bernard had died from the effects of the poison; was it suicide, or murder?

If suicide, what reason was there for such an act—what drove him to it? If murder, who was the culprit? Who could have possibly put poison into that phial? What a week of horror it was to all of us.

There was an inquest held the following day.

Thank Heaven, no horrible slur rested on the venerable grey head of my aunt; nor any of the establishment.

Questions were asked, as to who were in the house on the previous day. We informed the coroner that Grace Merton was the only visitor.

I shuddered, as I uttered that woman's name, and though no lingering thought struck any of us before, yet, as I faced the coroner, and his penetrating eye rested upon me, I felt the live blood leave my frame.

Good Heavens! surely she was not his murderer!

The vision of the dark silent figure, thickly veiled, who entered the house on the pretext of looking for her music, flashed upon me with horrible distinctness.

My appearance must have told volumes—as these thoughts flitted in my brain, for the coroner said earnestly:

"If you know of any clue, you must speak up; in a case of this sort you must not shield anybody."

It seemed very dreadful that I should be the means of laying a stigma of murder against the very woman whom I had once—ah, only a few days back—loved as a dear friend. I stated facts, though, just as they really were, and the verdict at once went against Grace Merton.

She was searched for in all directions by detectives, and at last found. She was arrested, and taken to await her trial. My own heart told me she was guilty, and that I had not been the means of arresting an innocent woman. How often my aunt's saying rang in my ear: "There is no end to the trail of the serpent."

What a wicked, unscrupulous wretch this woman had proved! Truly I had taken a viper to my bosom when I took her under my protection.

Had she done this deed out of frantic, mad love, or was it merely a bitter revenge towards me—poor, wronged me—who had not

injured a hair of this creature's head; who had simply endeavored to prevent her from committing a vile sin?

I will not lead the reader through the labyrinth of a court of justice. Suffice it to say that the trial was held, and a verdict of "acquittal" on the ground of insanity returned. Grace Merton was ordered to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure, and was sent to an asylum for criminal lunatics.

Thus the hope of my early youth was cruelly wrecked in the morning of life, and my existence for some years rendered a blank; but time, which heals all things, healed me, and ten years afterwards I married. Did I love my husband? Well, that question takes a little time to answer. Perhaps the love was not of the same kind.

Fifteen years change the disposition wonderfully, and the woman of thirty-five looks upon life in a different light to the girl of twenty-one. Yes; I think I loved my husband, although he was not exactly my ideal. In the first place, he was a widower with a family, and a very business-like man. I always had rather an aversion to a business-like man.

Poor Bernard had been so very opposite that it made my taste fastidious. It is almost as well that a woman should not meet her ideal too early in life: it often spoils her for the realities of after years.

I had no children; but my husband's family were quite enough to keep me well occupied, and I was always of a disposition to suit myself to circumstances.

I know now that I was simply a business man's wife, and not the bride of an officer of rank and position, as I might have been. My aunt lived with me, and took much of the responsibility of tutoring a large family off my hands; I had plenty of money, my husband being a wealthy merchant.

Some women would have envied my position; but my aunt thought I ought to have done better, having sprung from a family of genius, and been reared in a school where Mammon was not the only God. Yes; I was tolerably happy, and yet, notwithstanding my present comforts, I would sometimes find myself wandering about that little cemetery at Rothsey, where a green mound and white stone bore the remembrance of my early love, and yet I had not been true to his memory. It is not in human nature to be faithful to the dead for ever. Heaven, in its merciful judgment, ordains it otherwise; a veil of oblivion is thrown over the past.

One early evening in July, having finished the duties of the day, and administered to the comfort of my household, I was tempted to take a stroll in the cemetery, and to bend my steps towards the grave of Bernard McGregor. A woman stood beside me; she lifted her veil—I shrieked. It was Grace