

bin on the square all the time, and 'tain't bin no use."

"Drink!" said another, contemptuously; "she ain't drunk much, whatever they may say, nor eat neither. Why she ain't nothing but a bundle o' bones."

A man had left the court who tried to pass unobserved by the group that surrounded Mary, but, without a word spoken, every one seemed to make way for him, till he was hustled and pushed to the front. He looked uneasily round him and in a whining tone began, "I give you my word of honor, gentlemen—"

"Oh, d—n you," said a big fellow, turning savagely upon him; "shut up, and get out o' this. We'll make it hot for you before we've done with you. You may take your oath of that."

Neville turned and made his way to a small cart standing by the roadside. He heard angry growls on all sides of him, and thought he would not go back to Cheam just at once, but would wait till nightfall and enter the village unobserved.

Meanwhile with many moans and long-drawn sighs, Mary was regaining consciousness. She sat up and opened her eyes, and with strangely dilated pupils began to look around her.

"I'm to have my money back," she said, "and my time, and my journeys. Lor, what a lot o' times I've bin here. That'll make a deal of money, that will; and compensation, he said. And what did he say I was?" and she looked round with wide, pathetic eyes.

"Well 'e said you was a ill-used 'ooman, missis, and that's just about what yoo are. I'm blowed if ever I sin a wuss."

"Yes, he said I was a ill-used woman," she repeated, rising slowly, and saying the words over and over again.

"You come along of me, dear, and have a cup of tea," said the woman who had been kneeling by her side, "and then I'll go a bit o' the way home with you."

"Why, I'm going to Cheam myself," said a burly farmer, in a tone that implied some astonishment at the discovery of his own intentions, "and if you jump up in the cart I'll put you down at your own door."

But Mary walked on, unobservant of these offers.

"She's a bit crazy-live, poor soul," said another woman. "Better let her be—she'll go straight home."

"Well, she shan't go empty-handed," exclaimed the farmer, and diving down into his breeches pocket for a shilling, he laid it upon his open palm, and said, "Who'll marrow me that?"

Two or three shillings, a few smaller coins, and some halfpence were speedily laid upon his hand, and with them he hurried after Mary.

"Here, missis, we've put a trifle together for you, and we'll see what we can do for you before long. Tell your husband I hope I shall see him about again soon, and if he wants a job let him come to me; or you either, for the matter of that."

Mary stood for a moment with the same unobtrusive face, but as the kind tones fell upon her ear and the money was put into her palm, and her fingers pressed down upon it by a large friendly hand, a smile lighted up her face. Looking up with something of her own old frank expression, she courtisied and said,

"And I thank you kindly, sir."

Some hours later a laborer, who was passing through the woods, saw a motionless figure in the boat by the side of the little jetty that stretched out into the pond. He watched it for a few minutes, and then turning aside he went down the narrow path leading to the water's edge. There in the prow of the boat, leaning over and looking fixedly into the water, sat Mary Allan. He spoke to her, but she did not answer; and as he had just come from Breachley, which was resounding with the story of her wrongs, he did not pass on as he would probably have done otherwise, but stepped into the boat, and, touching her on the shoulder, asked if it was not time for her to be going home?

She looked up at him, and then, pointing to a white glimmer in the water beneath her, said:

"What's that?"

"That!" he replied, looking over the edge of the boat. "Why that's your own image in the water."

"No it ain't," she said; "'tis the child."

"Not it!" he exclaimed.

"But I tell you 'tis the child. My lady she was up there on the bank, and she pointed to the water an' I come and looked, and there was the child."

"I tell you 'tain't no such thing. Come away home. 'Tain't no good thinkin' about things like them. Why my Lady's bin dead and buried this two months. So just see what nonsense you're talking. Come home, do!"

He took her by the arm and she followed him. "Glad enough I was," he said afterward, "to get her away, for she looked as mad as a crazy dame."

It was dusk before she reached home, and a bright gleam was gleaming through the window of the long unused parlor. She opened the door, and her husband's voice fell upon her ears.

"Why, my lass, I've bin fairly moped about this. I thowt thou was to settle ma toysel'. And thou ga'st aff and says nowt at a'."

He was too weak to speak without frequent pauses; and the feeble voice, the catch in his breath, and the painful effort which it cost him to say even a few words, attracted his wife's attention and excited her fears.

"Ain't you so well, father?" she asked anxiously, drawing near the mattress, which was placed on a low wooden bedstead.

"Better lass, much better. Miss Stokes brought somebody wi' her, and they fastened up t' bed and gat ma in and med ma a drop o' broth. I'm as reet as reet now. An' there's teapot ready for thee, and a bit o' summit on t' hob."

Mary was watching him keenly. "If I tell him all at once," she thought, "it will kill him. Why, it very near killed me." So she sat down by his side and took his hand and stroked it. "There ain't much of it left, is there?" said he. "But I think your gettin' better, father," said she, in a tone that sounded almost like entreaty.

"Na, na, nor niver shall I this world. Things is a' wrong together, and aw don't see what's to be done. But we mum ha' patience, we mum ha' patience."

"Look 'ere now. I couldn't never bring myself to ask you afore, but you'll tell me true, John, won't you? Did you ever think as I'd done anything with that money, or made away with it?"

He started and turned upon her with such sudden angry eyes that she knelt by his side, and began to say:

"I didn't mean to put you out. You know I didn't, but everybody's bin against me, and you've never said as you was sure I'd paid it. You've only kep' on sayin' 'if I'd paid it I'd got the receipt. And then sometimes I've a thought you was like all the others, and didn't believe as I'd paid it at all.' Allan's anger faded out as he saw her trembling by his side.

"You've na reet to say sic a thing," he continued gravely; "but there, thou's had a hard time on't, poor lass. But I niver thowt thou'd turned on ma. What I allus said I say noo. Thou'll find the bill some day."

She laid her head beside him on the pillow, and said: "You always was such a clever old chap. Your words 'll come true, you see if they don't. And look 'ere what I've got;" and she untied a corner of her shawl and took out the coins in it one by one. "Master Barnett give 'em me; an' 'e says when you're ready for a job you've only got to go to 'im."

Allan raised himself with difficulty, and sat looking at her, his breath coming thick and fast.

"Thou's found it; I know thou has. That's whar thou's bin all day. Whar is it, lass, whar is it? Show it ma. Show it ma."

She put it into his trembling hands, and he smoothed it out upon the bedclothes, and spelt out the words and went over the figures. And Mary began the story of how she found it, and all that had happened since. As she talked on every other feeling sank before her desire of vengeance upon Neville. She attributed to him not only their poverty and suffering, but her husband's illness and the child's death.

"I'll see him hung for it," she exclaimed, "and I'll walk fifty miles to see him swing!"

"Na, na, lass, they'll never hang him. 'Tisn't so bad as all that. I've thowt about it agen and agen. I know he's a rogue, and he's been devilish hard. But somehow it don't seem all wrang as it did to begin with. Thou sees these Yan that knaws reet from wrang, an' if we're reet we're aside o' Him. I seem to see it as clear as clear, and thou'll see it, too, some day; but I'm fairly towed wi' talking."

He leaned back exhausted, and Mary sat silent by his side. Before long shouts from men and boy in the village street fell upon their ears, a rattling and beating and shaking of tin pots and pans; songs and whistling, and an indescribable babel of sound.

"What's that?" said Allan.

"Why that must be rough music," said Mary. "I ain't heard it since I were a child. They give old Tommy Gills rough music for turning his wife out o' doors one night, and then they broke the ice on the horse-pond here at the end of the road, and give him a good duckin'. He died the next day, so it's been put down ever since."

"That'll be what we ca' ridin' stang in our own country. 'Ise tell tha' about it, some day."

Suddenly there was a great shout of "There he is: that's him!" and all other noises were replaced by the heavy tramp of hob-nailed boots and cries of "Hold un, stop un! Dang it, don't let un go! That ain't 'im! This way; this way. That's 'im behind the haystack!"

The footsteps and voices had been drawing nearer, but now they seemed to take another direction, and the cottage was silent again.

Presently they heard the click of the garden-gate and stealthy steps on the garden-path. The cottage door was cautiously opened and carefully shut again, and looked and bolted by some who had entered.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Mary.

"Git a leet," said Allan.

"No, no!" was uttered in a tremulous whisper. "For God's sake be quiet. Don't stir: it's as much as my life is worth if they get hold of me."

A thrill of recognition shot through Allan and his wife.

"Git a leet," said Allan, sternly, let him see whar he is."

It was Neville. He was wild with terror, and as Mary held a candle to the fire he sprang to the window-shutters and closed and barred them. Then, by the dim light of the tallow candle, as he looked round he saw the white faces that were turned towards him. He fell upon his knees, and implored them to have mercy upon him.

"I didn't know where I was coming to, nor whar I was. I was creeping along under the hedge when I got away from them, and I saw a bit of freighth through the window. But I

didn't know whar it was. Don't give me up, for God's sake. It's as much as my life is worth. There ain't nothing as you can name that I won't give for my life. And I've a wife and seven children at home."

Mary listened intently. There came into her face a savage, eager look whilst he pleaded for his life, as of a wild animal waiting for his prey, and her hands worked convulsively.

At length she said, in a hoarse whisper— "You can't stir, father, but I can drag 'im along. I'll stick to 'im and keep on hollerin', and they'll soon come." And she went towards the door.

Neville threw himself on his knees before her, and implored her to spare him. But it was in vain. She spurned him with her foot, and tried to pass. He was desperate, his life was at stake, and he seized and tried to hold her back. Then, filled with sudden strength and fury, she dashed him from her, and he fell, stunned and bruised, against the wall, and lay there insensible.

"I'll get a stick," she said, turning to her husband with glaring eyes, "and quiet him till they comes up."

"Thou'll stop whar thou is," said he, sternly. "Does ta' mean to murder 'im, and me here a deeling? Thou'll stop wi' me."

"Look here, father—you ain't a goin' to let 'im off, not if you've the 'eart of a man. I needn't hit 'im again, I'll just open the door and holler out as 'e's here."

"Mary," said Allan, raising himself slowly in the bed and sitting up as he looked at her with great appealing eyes, "come here my lass and sit down wi' me. I've not lang for this world, lass, and thou'll see it plain enough if thou looks at ma. Somehow I can't bide to see tha botherin' in' and feebten', not though it's for me and child. Seems as if it had nowt to do wi' t' churchyard I'm gawin' to, nor wi' t' time as we've bin together and bin so happy, and had life lad wi' us an' aw. And now I've gawin' down to him, and I shall be a thinkin' and thinkin' o' tha, like I is now. And eh, lass, but I'd like tha to do sommut real grand, like as if thou was to forgive the man and let him ga. Why it'd be like partin' wi' your life to do it, and seems to me as if I could lie there and think o' it o'er and o'er again, and niver git tired of it till thou comes to ma. And I couldn't bide to think o' that fella's death lyin' at my doer like as it wad. Mind tha, it wad part us, it wad part us i' t' grave; and we niver hev been parted sen we come together. Let him ga, lass—let him ga. Poor meeserable beggar! and ex the Lord to forgive him, as I do."

Long before this speech, interrupted by many pauses and broken by his incessant cough, was finished, Allan had sunk on his bed. As he pleaded, his voice grew more and more feeble, and the words came in gasps. Mary stood in silence by his side; the candle was burning low in the socket, it spluttered and went out. Neville, who had recovered, was afraid to move or speak. The feeble spark of red in the fire gave no light in the room, and the voice of the dying man came like a sob to startle the listeners at long intervals. Then there was a silence, broken by hasty steps upon the gravel, the sound of many voices, and a loud knocking at the door.

Mary turned slowly and opened it, and a voice out of the darkness said—

"Missis, that old raskill's got away from us somehow; but we'll tar and feather 'im afore the night's over, and duck 'im in the horse-pond and all. Jemmy Higgs has just bin to tell us that as 'e was a comin' from Breachley an hour ago, he see the old bloke sneakin' up this path. Just give us a light, and we'll 'ave a look round and see if he's a hidin' anywhere about the place."

Mary heard a breath drawn fast and sharp in the darkness behind her, like some hunted creature in the woods panting with fear, and her heart gave one wild leap for joy. Then she clenched her hands and pressed them together, as if to keep back something with which she was struggling, as she said, slowly—

"My husband's very bad, as bad as 'e can be; an' I'd thank you kindly if you'd not make a noise and come about the place just now."

"Beg your pardon, missis, and very sorry fur to hear it; but we thought as how he shouldn't sneak away and get off."

"Thank you kindly," she said; "but please don't make no noise." And she shut the door and turned the key.

There was a whispered consultation outside, and then a sound of retreating footsteps along the pebbly path. Mary went back to the bed and laid her head down on the pillow. The tears which had so long forsaken her eyes began to flow, and her frame was shaken by sobs. Her husband turned, and put one hand upon her head, and said—

"'Tis a fine lass, and a bonny lass, God bless thee, Mary!"

An hour later, all the sounds in the village were hushed. Neville's friends had spread a report that he had got home and was in his own house. The one policeman from Strood had arrived, and peace was restored.

Mary left the bedside, and feeling her way to the back door, called out in a cold and constrained tone—

"Come along!"

And Neville groped his way to the gleam of moonlight which the open door admitted.

"Go down the garden and over the style into the forty-acre. You can get to your house then by the back way."

The man had crouched so long in that room in deadly terror that he was completely unnerved. Holding by the door, trembling and crying he tried to utter some words of thanks,

and some promises for the future. But at the sound of his voice Mary, with an expression of disgust, turned away. She could not trust herself to listen to him, for she felt as if she must seize some weapon and strike him to the earth. She went back to her husband's side, and in the night he died.

She seemed to have known it all before. She sat by his side, when all was over and her last offices fulfilled, not thinking, but waiting. There was something else to come; she did not know what it was, but something that she waited for. Perhaps it was the day, for when long rays of light stole through chinks in the shutter and cracks in the door she watched them. Then the voices of the birds fell upon her ear; the black-bird's whistle was like a call, and the thrush sang his loud clear notes over and over again, as if to make her understand. She rose from the bedside, opened the door, and stood in the cottage porch. How pitiless the day was; bright sun and clear sky, soft woods and springing flowers; nothing felt for her in heaven or earth; nothing was left to her. The day and the sunshine and the fullness of life fell like a veil between her and the dead, and spoke of eternal separation. In the desolate room with her dying husband little Jack had seemed very near to them. Now, father and child were together, and she was alone. Everything was changed. It was not death, but life, that she dreaded; life which was to part her from all she loved; life which would surround her and shut her in, and keep voices and hands from reaching her.

She looked toward the village. Here and there a thin thread of smoke told of cottage fires already kindled. The neighbors would have heard the truth about her the previous evening, and would be coming before long. Where should she hide herself? How could she escape? Her eyes wandered over the trees toward Breachley, and there came back to her the sweet scent of violets, which she had passed unnoticed at the time—violets covered with green leaves and wet with dew. How fond he was of them! He used to gather them on his way home from work, and bring them to her for a posy, as he called it. She would fetch some now, and place a bunch between her hands that she had folded on his breast. And with this thought she left the house, and passed unnoticed to the woods.

Early that day, women from the village, and a messenger from the Hall, visited the cottage. After some delay they entered. The dead man had been tenderly and carefully stretched out on his wretched bed, but there was no sign of Mary. She had gone to Strood, they thought, to buy food, as she had long been in the habit of doing, so as to escape unfriendly remarks. Then, as the day wore on, they imagined that she had walked to Breachley to see the undertaker who had buried her child. But in the afternoon it was known that she had not been seen in either place, and then a vision of the poor creature, wild with despair, made frantic by the injustice of her suffering and her solitude, began to appal them. Where was she? what had she done to herself?

"You had better go down to the ponds," said the man who told the story of how he had brought her home the previous evening. And they went. Looking over the side of the boat, they saw a glimmer as of light clothing, and drew up a heavy form, still and white, which they carried back and laid on the bed beside her husband. In her hand she still clasped a bunch of violets, and the expression of her face was tranquil.

Beneath the lime trees in the old churchyard there are three grassy graves, and that in the middle is a child's. "Little Jack, he du lie there," say the village children; but the elders whom they address pass on in silence, not insensible to the mute reproach of those green mounds.

A WIFE'S HAPPINESS.

No married woman can be happy if her husband does not appear to regard and honor her as well as actually to do so. The order of flirts have a certain article of faith which comforts them mightily—this is, that a man's wife is always the least interesting woman in the room to him. If he does not know this, she does; and some act of graceful courtesy, some little word or motion, nothing in itself, perhaps, but indicative of the tenderness he feels for her, gives the good wife a moment of triumph so innocent and sweet that no one should begrudge it to her.

A careless word, a little forgetfulness, quite pardonable or even unnoticed when they are alone, gives pain when watchful eyes, anxious to find a flaw in their wedded happiness, are upon the two who are bound for life to each other.

But men are singular creatures. Generally, it is at exactly such a moment that a husband chooses to give her the only sharp word he utters on the occasion; or to say something, quite unconsciously, which would lead any one to accredit them with a multitude of quarrels and bickerings. He does not know what he has done, and it does not improve her temper. Yet men generally love their wives better than all the other women they know put together. Those who have the grace to show this delicacy to others, are loved the best by women.