

"That's the way he always acts," mused Effie, tossing her curls with vexation, "He seems afraid of me, and looks at me as if I were a tigress. Oh, what horrid things men are!"

An hour later she met Oscar again in the music room. He was sitting at the piano when she entered, but the instant he saw her he clutched his hat and made a dive for the door.

"Mr. Wing!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot.

"Oh—yes—certainly—your servant, Miss Clayton!" he stammered, pausing, and fingering his hat nervously.

"What does he think of me?" reflected Effie. "I'll keep on in the same way though," and she added sternly: "Sit down to that instrument if you please."

He complied, with the air of a henpecked husband.

"Now play."

He played tremulously as one about to be dragged to the gallows.

"That will do. Now tell me why you avoid me, why do you look at me as if you expected me to do or say some dreadful thing? Am I a repulsive object? Do I look like a tigress? Are you afraid that I'll scratch your face, pull your hair out, or bite you?"

"N—no, not exactly."

"What then are you afraid of?"

"Won't you sco—sco! if I tell you?" he queried, with an apprehensive, mysterious air.

"No, go on!"

"Well, then, I was afraid you would come—down on me with your Woman Suffrage speeches, your Labour Reform lectures, your essays on the depravity of man—"

"Mr. Wing, is this insult to my womanhood intentional?"

"Insult? Oh, gracious! I thought you revelled in these isms—I did, upon my word."

"It shows your penetration! You could not have hurled a greater affront upon me if you had struck me in the face! I never thought I was masculine in look or manner—"

"You're not—you're not! Ten thousand pardons Miss, Clayton! I've been deceived! Oh, that rascal Tom—I'd like to pound him!"

At that instant Tom and Fleta appeared at the entrance, and, noting the situation, burst out laughing.

Effie's face grew redder, her eyes flashed with indignation, and yet she stood in an accusing attitude before Oscar!

He, surprised by the sudden arrival of the others, looked sheepish, and still retaining his posture of dismay, glanced with increasing embarrassment from one to the other.

"He knows how to approach and capture the feminine mind!" bawled Tom, slapping his sides.

"He looks so much like a conqueror too!" added Fleta, shaking her golden head with laughter.

And then they laughed in chorus, and pointed to Effie and Oscar, and giggled at each other and clapped their hands until their victims blushed and trembled with vexation.

"You're a pair of ninies!" cried Effie, spitefully, and rushed by them into the library.

"I'll play a trick on you, confound you!" muttered Oscar, flinging his hat across the room and shaking his fist as he dropped into a chair. "Had lots of fun, haven't you?—tickles you, don't it?—clever, aren't you?"

And the only answer he received was peal on peal of silvery laughter, mingling with Tom's provoking taunts. Exasperated at last, Oscar flung up a window, and leaped out into the garden. Then his tormentors sat down to reconsider the joke, and comment upon it.

"I think Tom is very mean—I never believed he would tell such a story about me!" sobbed Effie, leaning her head upon the library desk. "He made Oscar think I was a terrible creature, a coarse, brawling woman—and Oscar was really afraid of me—afraid I would lecture him—oh, this is too bad! What made Tom do it? I won't forgive him—I won't speak to him! Of course I don't care anything for Oscar! I shall never love anybody but Arnold! Still, one does not like to be thought a vixen or a screecher!"

Three days more went by. Effie was with Oscar a good deal, and had very little to say to Fleta, and less to Tom. It troubled that couple very little, however, for they seemed very much interested in each other, and took the indifference of their companions with the best good nature. Mr. and Mrs. Clayton made no comments, nor even let the young people know that they noticed their extraordinary demeanor.

Fleta's azure eyes, Fleta's charming smile, Fleta's musical voice, had completely upset poor Tom's heart. His merriment was almost lost in anxiety; his eyes were cast downward reflectively most of the time, and he found himself sighing. Time after time he had sought to introduce the subject, to acquaint Fleta with his feelings, but she eluded him on each occasion. Apparently interested, she would listen until he grew very pathetic, and then, with a toss of her golden tresses, and a roguish glance, she would break into a loud laugh.

"Hang it! it's all very fine to have your wit applauded, but when a woman laughs at everything a fellow says it makes him feel like an idiot!" reflected Tom, with some chagrin.

The next day, as Tom and Fleta were walking toward the old oak grove in the forest, a favorite afternoon resort of theirs, Effie, with a strange gentleman, appeared in a cross-path, and pausing a moment, exchanged a few hurried words.

"Oh, Arnold, there they are! They must not see you!" whispered Effie, anxiously.

"Fear nothing my darling!" was the warm reply. "Trust all to me."

In the meantime Tom and Fleta had entered the grove, and she had already begun to weave a wreath for his hat. Leaning against a tree, he contemplated her with something like veneration. How still and quiet she was, and as he revolved the fact in his mind, a new view of it was presented to him, and he remembered that she had said but little on their walk. As he looked at her now she seemed sad. He would know if anything troubled her, and, bending down, he rallied her on her silence.

"I have no desire to talk," she said, gloomily, and bent closer over the leaves in her lap.

"Then you will listen to me, won't you?"

"Perhaps."

"How shall I begin?" he thought. "I never saw her in this mood before. It's a cross between a sigh and a cry. Well, here goes!"

He kicked the leaves about a second or two, whistled a bar or two of a favorite opera, and then pushed his hat back with an air of resignation.

"Fleta, you have keen perceptions; you must have seen that I love you—that you are dearer to me than—"

"Than Nellie Waite, perhaps?" she interrupted, flashing a glance of reproach upon him.

"What on earth are you driving at?" queried Tom, in amazement.

"I thought you were honorable?"

"And so I am!"

"Stop—do not interrupt me again!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes gleaming, her bosom throbbing convulsively. "I will not listen to your protestations; once they would have been pleasant to me, but that is past—"

"Fleta, Fleta, why is this? What have I done?"

"Can you ask? Oh, what is the need of heaping deceit on deceit? Enough! I do not wish to see your face—to hear your voice! Let me go!"

She arose, tossed away the wreath, and started toward the path. Tom, white as a ghost, and trembling lest he should lose her, placed himself in her way.

"You shall not go—you love me.—By Heaven, you must not, shall not part thus—"

"Unhand me! You are not gentleman!"

She struggled to get away, but Tom threw his arm around her, and held her firm, while she reproached him most bitterly. Just then Effie and the stranger appeared on the scene, and commenced to wink and nod to each other, to the great provocation of our friend Tom.

"Who are you, sir? How dare you intrude? But the only reply was a chorus of laughter from the two, and a great whispering and tittering, and many gestures indicative of extreme amusement. Effie clapped her hands, and swung her hat, her companion "haw-hawed," and slapped his sides, and all the time Tom and Fleta remained in statu quo, looking very uncomfortable. At length Tom lost his patience, and sprang angrily upon the stranger. Effie threw herself between them, and placed her arm around her friend's neck.

"Stop, Tom! Arnold is mine—do you hear, mine?"

"I told you I'd play a trick on you, and I have—on you all!" said Oscar Arnold Wing, quietly.

Effie started back in mingled wonder and incredulity.

"You are not Oscar?" she gasped.

"Yes, I am," he laughed. "See my sister stare—even she does not know me! I had not seen her for three years. I had not seen Tom for four. I put on those big whiskers—she thought them genuine, I suppose—so did Tom, but Effie—"

"Knew her Arnold the instant she saw him this morning, but never dreamed he was Oscar!" exclaimed the maiden, clasping his hand.

"I say, Fleta, we've been sold! Oscar has beaten us at our own game."

Fleta turned away contemptuously; she would not vouchsafe an answer.

"Don't be cross, sis," interposed Oscar. "I wrote you that letter, accusing Tom of being in love with the village beauty, Nellie Waite! It's all fancy—you'd better make up."

Tom extended his hand yearningly, and Fleta took it blushing.

"But how did you know Effie, Oscar?"

"I won her heart, last June, in my natural guise, but under the assumed name of Arnold West. I wished to have the hand awaiting me when Fleta and I should come down."

"And I became a man-hater, because I thought Arnold had forgotten me," added Effie, artlessly.

The happy quartette returned to the house, and explained the affair to Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, who enjoyed it thoroughly. Two months later, a double marriage was celebrated.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

BY F. S. M.

Poor Sidney Ward! His great struggle in life, his years of hardship and weary toil, inspired by one solitary hope, brought him nothing but bitter disappointment after all.

Ten years before, with youth, strength, and energy upon his side, he had entered upon life's battle. He was successful. The world called him "lucky." That success bred of undeviating will is always attributed to good fortune. He amassed great wealth, and he was envied upon every side.

Yet all of his successes in life, all his wealth of

gold, were nothing to him. The desire of his early life, which had girded his loins and led him onward to victory—the one thought and darling wish of his soul through all these years of battle, lay dead at the bottom of his heart.

Ten years before—how well he remembered the day—he had parted from the playmate of his earlier years. She was the daughter of the squire, and she lived at the "big house yonder," where young Sidney, although far beneath her in the social scale, had free entry, because his ready wit and youthful enthusiasm had touched the fancy of little Katie's parents.

Added to this, he had some claim upon their good-will—he had saved Katie's life at the risk of his own one day when she fell from the light wooden bridge (now replaced by a massive iron structure) into the river which ran through the estate.

So the two grew together, the one a strong, impetuous boy, and the other an open-hearted, generous girl and the squire watched their progress, contentedly, and never said "Nay" to their familiar intercourse.

But when the time came that Sidney was no longer a boy, and he entered upon the duties of a clerkship at the city bank, a post which the squire, his patron, had procured for him, came also the beginning of his trouble.

He was taking an affectionate farewell of Katie, making numberless rash promises for her sake; while she, listening to them wonderingly, and nothing loth to hear, bent her face down upon his shoulder, and his arms stole round her waist.

In this position they were discovered by her father, and for the first time the truth dawned upon his mind.

He gently led her away, and, returning speedily to the room where Sidney remained, wondering what was next to come, the proud man's fury burst forth in a torrent of fierce invective.

"Ingrate upstart!" were the words he used—words that went deep into the soul of Sidney Ward and rusted there; "mean, dishonorable villain! Pauper! See that you never dare to set foot within these doors again."

Sidney Ward pursed his lips proudly to stifle the ready answer. Was it not her father? and what could he not bear for Katie's sake?

He endeavored to reason with the enraged parent, but in vain.

"Truly we love each other," he said, "and our position is unequal—what of that? Time, which works so many changes, may yet span the social chasm that separates us. I can wait—"

Vain was his appeal to the reason of the enraged and passionate squire. He was in an unreasonable mood just then, and Sidney was thrust from the threshold he had so often crossed with a light and careless step out into the dusty road—out upon a new life of sad reality.

He met Katie once again. It was hard by the little bridge where he had once rescued her from death, and here he told her of his love for her without interruption, and her heart responded word for word as his whispers fell upon her ear. He was going out into the world, he said—he would bind her to him by no promises, he was not mean enough for that, but he would return in a year or two, maybe—never, however, until he could count pound for pound with the squire, who was once his friend.

In these ten years he had succeeded greatly. His footsteps had wandered into many places, and fortune seemed ever to attend his efforts. He had worked hard and manfully, and he acknowledged that he was rich beyond his most idle anticipation. He could breathe again now.

Returning to the well-remembered scene, his youthful affection—the one object of his ambition still strong within him—full of rich belief in woman's constancy and faith in the object of her love; proud of the equality which resulted from his own labor, he forgot that time, which had dealt so favorably with him, might also have set its mark upon the old mansion while these ten long years rolled by.

The mark was there. The squire long since dead and buried, the old house closed up and deserted, for its mistress was away, the pretty village "improved" into a thriving little place—these were the sorrowful preludes to a bitter disappointment than all of them.

Katie was married!

Only a year before—just one solitary year of all those prosperous ten! If he could but have known!

This was the burthen of his cry, as he wandered through the grounds, and through the lonely rooms, and on the threshold of the deserted mansion until the disturbed echoes took up the theme, and the soft wind carried it upon the air—"If I had only known! If I could but have known!"

Another year sped by.

Sidney Ward, merchant and banker, had the reputation of being the hardest man of business and the most daring speculator known to the commercial world. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. His power was enormous. A nod from him would raise to a premium shares that were unsaleable at par.

He had written a brief letter to Katie, congratulating her upon her wedding, wishing her every happiness, and signing himself, "Yours truly," thus closing accounts, as he bitterly imagined, with his own heart and with hers. But, sitting in his office one afternoon engaged in the perusal of an enormous pile of documents, a massive, marked "private," was placed before him. It was addressed in a feminine hand, and he thrust it aside unopened.

"No, no," he muttered restlessly; "I have done with all that!"

He intuitively felt that it was from Katie.

An hour afterwards it again lay before him. He turned it over in a fidgetty, restless way, and again put it aside unopened.

Still he could not settle to his work. For a third time the letter was in his grasp. This time he broke the seal hurriedly, and laid the letter open upon his desk.

"My dear old friend," it commenced. He read no more, but leaving it still open upon his desk, he paced the room fretfully; then he thought of the old times when he was yet a boy, and he returned to his place and hurriedly read as follows:

"MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,

"I am sure that in memory of the past you will assist and aid me now. I can hardly hope, perhaps, that you should interest yourself in my welfare, but for my child's sake I must implore your generous help. My husband is dead, and I am sorely afraid that his extravagant habits have absorbed nearly the whole of our possession. I wish to see every creditor fully satisfied—yet I know so little of business. I do not care to place our affairs in the hands of a stranger. Will you undertake the business for me? I feel that I am asking a very great favor under the circumstances, if you only knew. Come to me, Sidney, for the old time's sake,

"KATIE."

"Humbled at last!" muttered the banker, with a strange smile of satisfaction, as he folded the letter methodically, and placed it in his pocket-book. It was probably the only letter in a woman's handwriting that had ever rested there.

A better feeling came anon. Long after business hours the concluding paragraph, written by a hand that trembled as it wrote showing, how completely Katie had broken down in her sad attempt to hide even from herself the feeling that controlled her, "Come to me, Sidney, for the old time's sake!" burned as letters of fire into the cold ashen heart of the man of business.

"I thought the account was closed, but I was wrong," he murmured. "I must go to her, for she needs my help."

Except that the mansion was occupied, the place wore the same appearance as when he saw it last. He walked across the iron bridge, and shrugged his shoulders disdainfully as he noted the ugly trellis-work that surmounted it. How different from the rustic wooden pole that served as a handrail and protection in the simple picture that he so well remembered? He walked up the narrow pathway, and once again he stood upon that threshold where his sorrows and his fortunes had commenced.

She met him there, and motioned him into the little room where their last interview had taken place so many years ago.

He went through the accounts, and he found that after the payment of her husband's debts she would have but a bare sufficiency. The estates had been mortgaged and was no longer hers. He conducted the investigation with the sharp eye of a thorough business man, and in two days he had a statement of her affairs prepared for her perusal. But in those two days he had learned more than she at first intended him to know.

He found, by connecting together certain scraps of information, that her wedding had been enforced by her father's desire and will.

She had waited nine weary years for the return of the wanderer, from whom she had received neither word nor token.

Were his actions free from blame?

Her husband was a rouse and a spendthrift, who had neither love nor liking for her. She had called her baby boy Sidney in remembrance of him.

Then he thought of their childhood's days, when she was a great heiress and he was a poor boy, her companion by a freak of fortune.

Was he worthy of her abiding love?

He could not disguise the fact that he had carried his bitterness toward her father into the love he professed toward her, and had caused his own misery by his own continued pride.

He pondered long and seriously; he found that the account was not closed; there was a great balance against himself.

"Kate," he said tremulously, "do you remember that it was in this very room that we agreed to share each other's sorrows?"

"Not that—not that," she replied. "Do not reopen the old—"

"Is the subject so repulsive to you? I think not, I hope not, Kate."

"Repulsive? No, but I am afraid—"

"Not of me, surely?"

He placed his arm round her waist, just as tenderly as he had placed it there eleven years ago, and her head fell upon his breast, for she had fainted.

Then the long-confirmed, passionate love burst from its imprisonment, and with a torrent of fond words he kissed her back to life. Then, as in a dream, she listened to him, until at length she realised her newly-born happiness.

And Sidney! He simply returned thanks to a beneficent Providence that had restored his dead love, and renewed the pulsations of his ashen heart, after many weary and unprofitable years.

For that life is unprofitable that lives solely for itself, and great riches are as nothing in the scale, if all else must be sacrificed for gain.