

could hear a thousand faint echoes whispered afar by the keen breezes of the night. But now the greetings and the echoes had gone out of the air, leaving it empty of sound as her life was empty of hope. She could no longer hear the laughter and music and bustle in the houses of her neighbors on each side of her. The only sounds audible to her now were the beating of her heart and the ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece.

At half past two in the morning Miriam was still alone staring at the cold ashes in the fire grate. Brooding had become almost a settled habit with her of late. If Kenelm were not at home before midnight she would wait up till he came in.

Whether in such circumstances she said much or little, or even nothing at all, she was an equal provocation to a man primed with liquor ready to quarrel with the first defenceless object he could find, and in any case best left to come to his senses in his own time and in his own way.

It was nearly three o'clock when she heard the familiar footfall of her husband on the pavement. She started up in her chair. Her wet eyes grew bigger and brighter as fear took possession of them. She heard the crunching of the gravel path, and pressed both hands against her breast hard, as if she would crush even its flatness down. She heard the gate creak and her heart jumped to her throat so that she gasped for breath.

Kenelm, with thunder in his face at the sight of Miriam, lurched into the room. She did not move from her chair; did not speak; dreaded even to look at him. But the dog at her feet bounded forth, not with a bark of welcome for her master, but with a growl as if the figure just entered were a menacing intruder.

Without a word, but with a glare which sufficiently indicated his mood, Kenelm gave the animal a savage kick under the jaw and heavy drops of blood commenced to fall from its mouth. Whining piteously, the dog crawled back to Miriam and hid itself in the folds of her dress.

Until Miriam heard the dog's cry and looking down saw the blood upon her dress, she was only half conscious of what had happened. Now it seemed that at last a new nature had come to her. Kenelm had not time to see what she did. She herself hardly knew what she did until it was done but in an instant she had stooped down and turned upon him and the heavy end of the poker crashed through Kenelm's hat to his head. He reeled giddily, dropped.

White to the lips now, Miriam knelt by his side, and held her ear to his mouth. She could feel the sickening waft of his breath upon her cheek—he had been stunned; that was all. The suddenness rather than the strength of Miriam's blow had temporarily paralyzed.

In the bedroom a little white robed figure waking and finding nobody to answer her call, crept affrightedly out of bed. Softly, bare-footed, Enid entered the sitting room and when Miriam rose from beside her husband's prostrate form, reassured, it was to see Enid gazing at her.

"Mummy!" cried the child in alarm. Miriam quickly hugged Enid to her. "Mummy!" repeated the insistent voice, half smothered at Miriam's breast. "What's daddy doin' like that? Why was oo kneelin' by him, mummy?"

For a while Miriam did not know what to say. She hugged the child still closer to her and after a while answered, "Father has fallen asleep dearie. Come, let us go."

"But isn't daddy coming, mummy?" queried the half stifled voice.

"No, no, dearie. He—he prefers to—to stay where he is. He is better there till—he wakes again. Come dearie. We will go to granny's."

A few minutes afterwards, Miriam, with the child snugly nestled in her arms, was hastening from the house through silent and deserted streets.

A week later, on New Year's Day, it chanced that Kenelm Lennard was out visiting patients when from the other side of the street a child's voice called to him. He heard it above the whirr of the traffic.

"Mummy! mummy! There's daddy. Daddy! daddy!"

The attention of Miriam, who was taking the child shopping with her, had been for the moment distracted, and al-

most before she was conscious of missing the little hand from her own, she was toddling after her father across the road. Kenelm had turned on hearing the call but was compelled to go forward by the rush of vehicles.

Suddenly he heard another voice—an agonized cry, unmistakably that of Miriam.

Kenelm looked into his wife's eyes. "Come home, Miriam," he whispered, "and from this New year's Day let us try afresh—for the child's sake."



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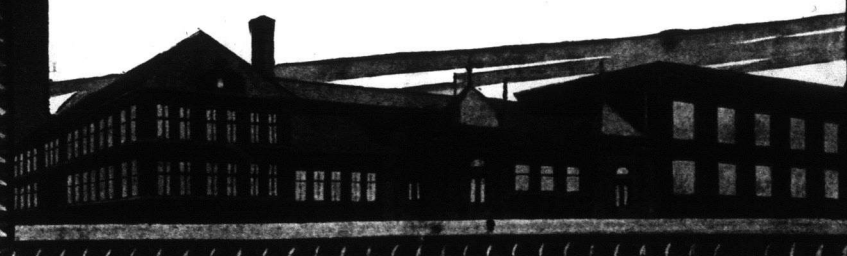
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