

GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

DUKE MASON'S ADVENTURE.

Duke Mason had lost his way.

There could be no doubt about it. As he paused in perplexity and gazed around him, five struck sharply from the distant Speckhaven churches, clearly heard through the still, frosty air, and at five-ten the express train from London left Speckhaven station. Only ten minutes to spare, and completely lost and bewildered, a stranger in Lincolnshire, and with not a notion of whereabouts he might be now.

Mr. Mason paused with a face of disgust at his own stupidity and looked about him. Westward lay the fens and marshes, melting drearily away into the low, gray sky; eastward spread the wide sea, a bleak blast sweeping icily up, with all the chill of the German Ocean in its breath; and north and south, the dismal waste land stretched away treeless, houseless, unspeakably forlorn and deserted.

The month was March, the day the twenty-fifth. Was Duke Mason likely to forget the date of that memorable day, when he lost his way, and the romance of his life began?

For seven and twenty years his life had gone on, as flat, as dull, as uneventful as those flat marshes that lay on every side of him, as gray and colorless as yonder cold gray sea, and on this twenty-fifth of March, wending his way at his leisure, to catch the express train for London, and mistaking the road, an adventure so singular and romantic befell him as to almost atone for those hopelessly stupid and respectable seven-and-twenty years.

The short March day was darkening already. The yellow wintry sun had dropped out of sight down there behind the fens and sand hills; sky and sea were both of the same cold