

gloomy and morose. Yes; a haunted man. A man to be pitied, for it is the face of his own wife that invariably calls the ghost from its lurking place. Despise him ye must; yet oh! gentle and happy hearts, pity him!

Remorse and fear sting him into a savage recklessness. But the remorse is slight compared to the fear he feels for his own safety. He tried to persuade himself into the belief that Neal Despard was dead, as nothing had been heard of him for more than four years. But then there was no proof that he had died. "He may be living; he may return to Canada, and weary of bearing the burden of your sin, will lay it down at your door, and denounce you as the real criminal." So whispered into Arthur Macdonald's ear the spectre which haunted his life. And although he knew well that if such a thing did happen that he would stand a fair chance and more than a fair chance of exculpating himself — for he had only to deny the charge and laugh his accuser to scorn, and who would doubt him? Who believe the word of the man who had acknowledged himself guilty and who, for six years had quietly borne shame and exile. Notwithstanding all this, Arthur dreaded the return of this man. It was the old story — "The wicked flee when no man pursueth."

"Your friend, Miss Stuart, has won great applause in Hamilton," remarked Arthur, throwing down the newspaper and passing his cup for more coffee.

"Ah! to be sure, she sang there last night; what does the paper say about her?"

"Oh! the usual trash — beauty and winning grace, talent and all the rest of it. By Jove! I cannot see what the fools find to admire in that pale-faced, puritanical damsel. I beg pardon Sybil; but really, though she is your bosom friend and confidante and all the rest of it; I cannot for the life of me conjure up the faintest semblance of liking or admiration for Miss Stuart."

"No, for your prejudice is too deeply rooted," answered his wife coldly — Mollie, poor innocent Mollie was always an apple of discord between these two.

"You call her pale faced as though that were some great fault in her; and you know Arthur that the poor girl has suffered enough to blanch not only her face but her pretty brown hair as well," continued Sybil, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"I, I know nothing about it," answered Arthur, almost roughly; for it had seemed to his suspicious mind as though her simple words had conveyed some double meaning, a suspicion enhanced by the slight emphasis she put on the words — "you know."

"If the girl is fool enough to moon away her life and good looks, mourning for a scoundrel like Neal Despard, it is her own look out; for my part I cannot understand such nonsense, nor, I should say could any person endowed with common-sense. Why does she not marry? There are dozens of young fellows who would consider themselves blest beyond all other mortals if Miss Mollie would but listen to their wooing. More fools they!"

"Mollie loved Neal Despard much too dearly ever to forget him so far as to wed another," answered Sybil quietly; but an observer might have noted the angry sparkle in her blue eyes.

"Bah!" cried Arthur contemptuously. "much he valued her love!"

"Besides," went on Sybil, calmly ignoring her husband's last words, "Mollie believes him to be innocent."

"What?"

"Sybil glanced up in surprise; as his startled tones fell upon his ears, and saw that his face was very pale, while his eyes were fixed eagerly and almost fearfully upon her face. He averted his gaze when she looked at him, and laughing nervously, said:

"I — you surprised me. I was taken aback for a moment. You surely do not mean to say that Miss Stuart seriously believes Despard to be innocent of — of the crime of which he is accused. Why he convicted himself at once, and of his own free will, when the discovery of the theft was made. It is absurd, you know."

"Nevertheless she has a firm belief in his innocence."

"Ah indeed! Who does she think guilty then, if her ci-devant lover is innocent?" he enquired sarcastically.

"I really do not know that she suspects anyone in partic-

ular," answered Sybil surprised at her husband's manner, and the evident agitation which he had evinced when told of Mollie's trust in her exiled lover.

"How does she account for his conduct in tamely bearing the shame of guilt?" he asked with an assumption of carelessness, though he waited breathlessly for the answer, which certainly did not reassure him when it came.

"She suspects, I fancy, that he is trying to shield someone else."

Sybil's eyes were bent thoughtfully upon the table as she spoke, otherwise she might have seen the violent start her husband gave, and his quick, searching glance into her face.

"Ah! very silly of her I must say," he replied carelessly, "but just what might have been expected of her though. Pray what is your opinion of the matter?"

"Of course it is extremely foolish of poor Mollie to delude herself with such hopes. Neal must be guilty, there is no other way of looking at the matter. Poor, poor, Neal! Oh! how could he do it? He must have known it would break Mollie's heart, poor darling!" murmured Sybil sadly.

"By Jove! you women are curious creatures; why I believe you actually pity that fellow. Poor, poor Neal indeed!"

"I do indeed pity him," answered Sybil earnestly. "However much he sinned; I know him well enough to feel assured he has suffered keenly these six years past. He was my friend years ago," she added, with a slight tinge of regret in her voice.

"And your lover as well; I have heard," retorted Macdonald with a disagreeable laugh.

Sybil's face flushed but she did not reply; for at this moment the door opened and a pretty, fair-haired boy of about four or five years, rushed in. The angry flush faded from Sybil's cheek, at sight of him, and the indignant sparkle in her gave place to a look of tenderest love as she held out her arms to her little son.

"Oh mamma!" he cried, "I have been having such fun."

"Have you my pet? what have you been doing?" she asked, pulling off the little damp mittens from his hands, and taking off his fur cap, softly smoothed back the tangled curls.

"I've been out in the yard, ever since I had my breakfast; and I've been snow-balling Peter."

"And now I suppose you are hungry enough for a piece of bread and a mug of milk," said his mother laughing as she poured out the milk.

"Mamma," exclaimed Kenneth after he had taken a good drink from the mug.

"May Peter take me over to Bertie's this afternoon?"

"Yes dear; if Peter is not too busy, what are you and Bertie going to do this afternoon?"

"Bertie is going out snow-shoeing and I am going to take my sleigh and go with him."

"Nonsense," put in his father sharply, "you cannot take your sleigh into the deep snow, besides you are not to go so much with Bertie Stuart; do you hear Kenneth?"

"Oh papa! I want to go so much," cried the child with a surprised look in his large blue eyes.

"But you cannot go sir. Sybil I wish you would keep the boy from going so frequently to the Stuarts, I am not going to have my son turn into a Methodist parson like that Stuart boy."

"Very well," answered Sybil calmly, though her face was pale with anger and scorn — "since you wish it, I will see that Kenneth does not associate so much with Bertie; but all I can say, Arthur, is that I hope and trust your son may become as great and noble a man as Herbert Stuart bids fair to be."

So saying, she arose and left the room, leading little Ken by the hand. When she had reached her own private sitting-room or *boudoir*, she sank trembling into a chair; and covering her face with her hands burst into tears. It was unlike her, this strong, resolute woman, thus to give way to the womanly weakness of tears, but she felt strangely overwrought and unhappy; scenes, such as has just been described, had of late become very frequent between her and her husband, and she felt degraded and lowered in her own self-respect by the fact of his petty tyranny and exacting selfishness; and her proud, refined nature rebelled at the scant courtesy shown her by the one who above all others