

ALGERNON HOWARD'S WIDOW.

FOR the first time in her life Jessie Howard had to look the future squarely in the face; and sitting there, in the quiet, shady rooms of the St Estepho House, her chin resting on her hand, her great wistful black eyes looking absently down on the children trooping home from school, it seemed to her as if it were as nearly an impossibility as anything else that she should emerge from this dense cloud that enveloped her.

Such a strange romance it had been, that bright young life of hers, out of which the sunshine seemed suddenly to have gone for ever, since the day two weeks ago, when her handsome young husband, to whom she had been married but one month, had been brought home to his hotel, dead, an hour after he had kissed her good-bye in the morning, as he went off for a day's pleasuring with some boon companions.

They had met in New York City--handsome Algernon Howard who fell in love with Jessie Otway's sweet, proud face, almost the moment he had seen her--a paid companion to a peevish old woman on whom young Howard felt constrained to make a duty-call.

And he had married her in one of those rash impulses that had so many times governed his life--married her, knowing perfectly well the horror his aristocratic family would feel, but caring as little as he was in the habit of caring for anything but the special thing he wanted.

And Jessie was delighted and happy as the sweet summer days were long, and assumed her new honors with a sweet, serious dignity that was enchanting, and loved her handsome husband devoutly, and patiently bided his pleasure to break the news of his marriage to his family.

Then into the very midst of the bright, happy life at the quiet, luxurious hotel to which Howard had taken his bride, death came; and, sitting in the warm glow of the June sunshine, Algernon Howard's widow was trying to think what she would do--wondering if ever the horrible depression of spirits, and dull gloom and pain at her heart, would lift themselves and let her breathe freely once more.

She had not a relative in all the wide world to appeal to for shelter or advice. Her money was nearly gone--that money she had nearly broken her heart to have to search for among her husband's effects.

Her position with her former employer had been readily filled when she left it, and she was absolutely, absolutely alone in all the wide, wide world--she, with her sweet, haunting face, that was so charmingly lovely to other men besides the dear dead one, who would never take it and kiss it again, she, with her pitiful, sombre garments of deep, deep black--so little more than a girl--a widow, and to face the world alone.

A few days before it had occurred to this desolate young creature to write a pitiful, yet gravely proud, statement of her affairs to the rich, aristocratic brother of her dead husband--the gentleman who would have been so horribly terrified to call her "sister"--and half an hour ago there had come an answer to her dainty letter that said, in a few caustic words, that the family preferred to hold no communication whatever with the woman who had been so successful in inveigling Mr Algernon Howard into a marriage so painfully disgraceful, also inclosing a crisp hundred-dollar bill, saying it was the last she would under any circumstances receive, and signed, in a very bold, elegant hand, "Philip Howard."

At that time Jessie had been sorely hurt at the insulting letter, and her black eyes had flashed scornfully at the sight of the money accompanying it. Then she had realised that it would never do to carry a sensitive heart into the desperate world, and so she philosophically told herself.

But she returned the bill in a blank sheet of paper--blank except for her name, which she wrote with almost fierce boldness of chirography, Jessie Otway Howard!

And then she paid her hotel bill out of her slender funds, and took off her solitaire diamond ring--a diamond that had belonged to the Howards for generations, a rare jewel, with warm, golden fire at its glowing heart--and tied it to a silken cord and wore it beneath her dress, and then went out in the world again to conquer or be conquered by her fate.

"I am quite sure I shall like you ever so much, Mrs. Smythe. Really, it is so refreshing to find a young lady who confesses to such a plebian name. Nearly all my applicants for the position of travelling companion and maid to my daughter call themselves St. Lenox, or Van Rensselaer, or De Fairfax. Yes, I am sure you will suit my daughter, and