

Alas ! how easily things go wrong,  
A sigh to much, or a kiss too long ;  
There comes a mist and a driving rain,  
And the world is *never* the same again.

A minute later footsteps approached through the darkness, and they heard Sidney's voice calling them.

"How can I clasp his hand again," thought Frank, bitterly, as he joined them.

#### PART IV.

Three years had passed since that stormy night in the Bois de Boulogne, three years fraught with events both grave and gay. It was November again ; it was the anniversary of that very day when Vereker had left Paris for Marseilles, on his way to Australia, and had taken his sad and guilty farewell of his friend's wife.

Frank sat in his comfortable office in Throgmorton street, Melbourne, and thanked his stars he was not outside, for one of those terrible dust storms, that have no equal throughout the world, was blowing, and which search out everything in their aggressive magnificence, until they clear the long, wide streets completely of passengers.

Vereker walked to the office window and looked out, but not being able to see the other side of the street for dust, he sat down again, and business being dull, thought he might indulge in the luxury of a pipe. He was reaching his hand for the tobacco jar and humming a little song at the same time when he heard the bell of the outer office ring, and a moment later the office boy announced, "lady to see you, sir."

"A lady to see me?" reiterated Frank, in much surprise. He didn't suppose a dog would be walking the streets of Melbourne in such a storm, much less a lady, to see him. "What name?" he asked.

"Please sir, she didn't give no name," replied the boy.

"Show her in," a little curtly, for he felt he was being done out of his pipe.

The next moment in came Esme Harton; flushing, half timidly, half joyously, and wholly beautiful. As she saw the look of bewilderment, quickly succeeded by one nearly approaching horror, that came over his face, the flush died out of hers, and pale and terrified at his expression, she came a little nearer.

"Frank, why do you look at me so strangely? I have come all this long, long way to see you, come because you told me that if ever"—

He interrupted her coldly, sternly,—*"Mrs. Harton, before you say any more, before you say things that perhaps afterwards you would give a good deal to recall, I must tell you—it is my duty to do so—that I am married ; that I have been married two years."*

"And you swore to be true to me," she murmured with white lips.

"True to you," he repeated, almost scornfully, "Mrs. Harton, don't you know that your husband is the best and truest fellow that ever lived, my dearest friend, although I wronged him so deeply. Surely a woman knows that however greatly a man loves her, if she leaves a good and true husband for his sake, he must lose all respect for her. It is true I asked you to come with me, you refused, and I respected you for it. It is true I wrote to you from Melbourne, urging you again to come, and you ignored my letters, and then, when at last I had told myself that you were too good and pure to listen to me, and determined to forget you and marry a true and good girl of my acquaintance, then, I say, just as I am learning to know what a quiet and peaceful life is, you break through your bonds, leave the best husband in the world, and shamelessly take this long, long journey to seek me out, to once more tempt me as you did on that never to be forgotten night in the Bois de Boulogne. It was your fault then, it is your fault now. I never meant to have told you that I loved you, till you leaned your head upon my breast and told me your heart was breaking."

Motionless, she stood before him, her face looking as though it were carved out of marble, her hands locked together, her great grey eyes fixed on him, as the bitter words issued from his lips.

Then with one gasping sob she fell at his feet. When he stooped to raise her she was dead.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Vereker, two days later, "I wonder, Frank, how these newspapers came to be overlooked. Just see, they are dated months back. How very careless ; you should speak to the post-master about it ;" then, as she carelessly ran her eyes down the "births, marriages and deaths," of the Times, she paused at a name in the last list,—*"Frank, didn't you tell me that the unfortunate lady, who died of heart disease in your office the other day, was named Harton? I wonder if this was a relative of hers? —"*

"On February 3rd, at Woodlands, Rowtown, Cheshire, Sidney Harton, aged 34."

"I wonder?" said Frank.

