

"All things considered it was a deucedly unpleasant task that lay before him," so he told himself.

What ever remorse had been in his heart before was now completely swallowed up in the feeling of intense thankfulness at his release from the haunting fear of that exposure which he justly merited. Alas! Must it be over so, that the same wind which wafts peace and joy to one, brings to another tumult and wild unrest? Perhaps what his wife that morning had told him of Mollie's belief in her lover's innocence, had served to intensify the relief he experienced at the news he had received in the afternoon. For a new, sharp fear had pierced him that perhaps Mollie had some glimmering of suspicion as to the truth, though not sufficient to act upon. Ah! He need not have feared a blow from this gentle girl, for had she not *known* the truth for more than six years, and yet had not used her knowledge against him. At any rate he felt he was safe now and could defy her. Meantime he felt it incumbent upon him to act a part before his wife.

Sybil fancying something had happened to annoy him, went and laid her hand caressingly on his arm.

"What is the matter Arthur?" she asked pleasantly. "You look rather put out about something."

"Well I am so; that's a fact Sybil," he replied in a tone that was meant to convey to her mind the impression that he was seriously upset by something. She looked anxiously at him and waited in silence for him to continue. When he spoke there had darted into her mind one thought and that was—*debt*—for Arthur had more than once since their marriage got into troubles of that nature; and it was tolerably safe to assume that he had succeeded already in making a pretty deep hole in his wife's fortune, large as it was.

"You remember Dick Stanley?" he asked after a pause; and she, looking puzzled at this abrupt question answered

"Yes, I remember him very well; but what of him?"

"Well you know he went home to England about two years ago and now he is in India."

"Yes."

"I received this letter from him to-day,"—drawing a letter from his pocket as he spoke—"it is the news of Neal Despard's death."

"Dead! Oh no, no, no!"

"Pale as the lace about her neck, and with wide, staring eyes, she had drawn back a pace or two as she uttered that passionate cry.

"Neal dead—it cannot be," and she burst into tears.

"Sybil my dearest," said Arthur throwing his arm about her. "Do not take it so much to heart; why is it not much better to know something definite about the poor fellow—even this"—hesitatingly—"than to live on in doubt and uncertainty as to his fate, as has been the case for the last five years or more?"

"Oh yes! But—but it is so sad to die in a foreign land amongst utter strangers, with not one friend near him—oh Arthur it breaks my heart to think of it."

"Well of course it is rather hard lines; but he brought it on himself."

Truly he had brought it on himself and only Arthur knew that the words he had spoken held a deeper meaning than the one conveyed to Sybil's mind.

"Oh! Arthur how can you be so cruel to cast that up against him—now he is dead, poor, poor Neal."

"Well," said he, a pang of remorse seizing him, as Sybil burst into another fit of sobbing—"you have nothing to blame yourself with."

"And Mollie, ah! poor Mollie!" cried his wife suddenly remembering her, who had been the dead man's betrothed.

"All her hopes of seeing him again are gone now; gone forever. My poor Mollie!"

There was a pause after this, during which she lay back in the chair where Arthur had placed her, with her hands over her face, while he stood leaning against the mantel-piece, sulkily pulling his moustache and staring into the fire. His frame of mind was not an enviable one at that moment. A fresh wave of remorse had surged over his heart and he was struggling with might and main to drive it back. At that moment he was thinking—"What if she knew; what if Sybil were to find out!" And the very thought filled him with horror. For he loved his beautiful wife—next to himself. "Let me see the letter, Arthur please; if you have no

objection. Are there any of the particulars in it of—of Neal's death?" she asked with quivering lips.

Here is the letter, you can see what he says about it." He handed it to her and pointing out the paragraph relating to the subject, left the room, saying something about dressing for dinner.

And she sat there with the letter in her hand endeavoring through blinding tears to read the words which told of the death of that old, old lover of hers. The boy who had wooed her under the blue skies of Italy, the man who had pleaded so often and so passionately for her love. There are few women who do not always think kindly—perhaps a trifle tenderly of the men who once loved them. The paragraph in Mr. Stanley's letter which her husband had pointed out to her ran as follows:

"By the way have you heard of poor Neal Despard's death? I was awfully shocked when I heard of it. I came across him in Ireland about two years ago; but he did not seem over-anxious to renew our old acquaintance. He was looking very ill then I thought. He was secretary or something of that sort to Lord A—. I heard some five months later that he had left Ireland and gone to Spain. Then I saw and heard nothing more of him until about three weeks ago I happened to meet a friend of mine here in Calcutta. He had known Despard, and from him I heard that the poor fellow had died of fever at Madrid. I never could understand the cause of his sudden departure from Canada that time. Everyone seemed to think it was on account of the rupture of his engagement to Miss Stuart. But the mystery is, if he was so fond of her as all that, why the affair was broken off at all. Poor old Neal! he was as good a fellow and as true a gentleman as you would meet anywhere, and I for one am heartily sorry for his death. How will Miss Stuart take the news do you think? She was an awfully pretty girl I recollect."

"I am so glad no one but ourselves ever knew the real cause of his leaving Canada," murmured Sybil to herself as she dried her eyes with a cobwebby handkerchief; and then she glanced down at the letter again and those words at the end of the paragraph caught her eyes again—"How will Miss Stuart take the news do you think?"

"Oh! heaven help her to bear it!" cried Sybil involuntarily, clasping her hands. A tremor of fear, of nervousness went through her whole frame at the thought that upon her would devolve the task of telling Mollie the ill news.

"Will it break her heart altogether I wonder," thought she sadly. Ah! she did not calculate the strength of the pale, gentle girl who had already borne so much. 'Tis the gentle ones who are the strongest after all.

Then she remembered a conversation she had once had with Mollie about Neal, one of the rare occasions on which his name was ever mentioned between them; and Mollie had inadvertently let fall some words, which betrayed her trust in Neal's innocence. But no harm had been done for the conviction of his guilt was so firmly rooted in Sybil's mind that this "vain hope" as she termed it, of Mollie's had not had power to disturb that conviction. It only made her pity the poor girl the more. But now, the thought of the anguish it would give Mollie to relinquish this dream of seeing her lover righted made Sybil's tears flow afresh. She of course naturally thought that Mollie's only desire was to prove Neal innocent since she deemed him so.

"But oh my poor Mollie!" she cried, "it was an idle dream; for who could be guilty but Neal?"

Ah! it is often thus; we seek the truth and the truth lies on the threshold of our own door and we pass in and out daily and see it not!

Nevertheless, she could more than half realize the pain it would be to Mollie to give up forever the hope of re-union with her lover. All that was done away with now; the joys and sorrows of that brief love dream were past and gone never to return again. Ah! that is the saddest thought of all; that no power on earth can bring back what is past and gone. Can we bring back our beloved ones when the grave has closed over them? Oh no! though our hearts are numb with pain and longing they cannot come back to us; for God has taken them. Others will come by and by to fill up the empty places; other voices will charm us, other eyes look