

fore. But separation had taught him his true feelings toward her, and he had written intimating but not expressing his hopes. Her answer had been that of a woman; not replying to what he had not asked, yet carrying a tone that showed she understood and appreciated. No further communication had passed between them except the unsigned present which Thornton had sent every Christmas. Meanwhile with a sublime faith in the woman and his fate he had worked for the money which a proud man likes to bring his bride; and now after ten years' labor—yet how short seemed the time—it had come, and Thornton had returned East with the gift of wealth to claim the dark-eyed lass of his early days.

Graham's reply to his last question was a grateful relief to the keen anxiety he had experienced in noticing the many changes wrought in old environments, and suddenly realising all that might have happened to mar his hopes during the length of his absence. His manner during the rest of the meal was an abandon of good-will.

He spent a half hour shaking hands with old friends, and then found himself walking up the street with Graham, who was in the highest of spirits. Suddenly in the midst of reminiscences Graham paused and plucking his companion's arm, pointed to a woman coming out of a store.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Who?"

"Kate Ingersoll."

Thornton turned. The woman had stopped in front of the store window and he had a good view. He stood staring like one struck dumb—tall, thin—almost angular—a little gray in her dark hair at the temples; her face wan, listless, expressionless, with a dash of color at the throat—as if denoting a tawdry desire to cling to a youth that had long since vanished; the dark eyes as she turned toward them bleak yet with a sickly gleam of affectation mingling in their hopeless depths,—a woman who had lived and learned in vain. That could not be Kate, and yet—oh, Hea-

vens!—how familiar the line of the chin—of the brow! A quiver came into his lips, and half reeling he clutched Graham by the arm and hurriedly drew him on; then with a supreme effort at self-control plunged into a conversation which gave his companion no opportunity for questions.

* * * * *

Pale and heavy-eyed Thornton stood on the depot platform waiting for the train. How he longed for it to come—to take him forever from this place that was the grave of all his hopes, of all his dreams! What a night of misery he had passed!—a night in which the face of the woman he had seen—wasted, colorless, insipid—haggish almost—burned itself into his brain like a phantom of hate; while the other—the cherished image of his love, his Kate, the girl of ten years ago—faded into hopeless oblivion, leaving his life a bleak waste of despair. But it was all over now—as much as it ever could be. Ah, there was the train! How glad he was to leave! Just one last look, and then for the grand freedom of the great West—away from this blighting Eastern atmosphere in which hearts and faces grew old.

How soggily apathetic lay the town in the sickly glare of the morning sun! The church spires might have been monumental insignia testifying to a sluggish, moribund humanity of dormant circulation. But the train had come to a pause—now aboard for God's own country! Standing on the vestibule of his coach he suddenly spied up the street a man running. The man waved his hand to him; it was Graham—running to catch him! But it was too late: the cars jarred under the first efforts of the engine. He was glad; he hated Graham—hated him since he had pointed out the face of that woman—for the sly amusement he had seemed to take out of his misery, though after the first revulsion he had made every effort to conceal it. Thank Heaven, the train was now moving! But who was that? A woman had got off the back coach and was coming along the platform toward him, a small valise swinging in her hand.