

She flushed and looked up quickly for his caresses were rare nowadays. But there was sorrow as well as joy in the kiss, for he, in the instant his lips met her she smelt the brandy on his breath, and the old aching pain throbbled in her bosom, and shone in her eyes even as she raised them so gratefully to his flushed, haggard face.

Grateful for his caress! and he was her husband! O you happy wives who read this! how is it possible for you to understand the pathetic hungering and longing of the neglected wife for the loving word, the tender caress, that alas! is now seldom or never bestowed. Or the rapture, the intense thankfulness that fills her heart to overflowing when, all unexpectedly, he kisses her with something of the tenderness of old times, or speaks to her with a sound in his voice like the echo of a half-forgotten song?

Think, happy wife!—when you stand by your cheerful hearth with your husband's arm around you and his loving voice speaking kindly to you—then think of those other; less happy wives, and—pray for them.

Sybil rose from her seat, and clasping Arthur's arm with both hands she laid her head down upon his shoulder.

"Dear Arthur, I do entrust you to take care of yourself, it would break my heart if anything happened to you," she said pleadingly.

A faint spasm passed over his face as he looked down upon that other face, so pure and beautiful, yet so sorrowful. "You are an angel Sybil, to care so much for a brute like me."

"Oh Arthur! Hush! you must not speak so, it hurts me." And, perhaps because the subject of his own unworthiness was distasteful to him, perhaps because he wished to spare her feelings, he did not pursue the theme.

"Of course I intend to take care of myself," he said a trifle impatiently, "but you women are never happy unless you've got something to worry over. By the way, if you are not going with me this afternoon, I think I will ride Sultan instead of driving."

But he did not tell her that he meditated riding Firebrand home again, in the event of his concluding the bargain with old Marks, and she never thought of his doing so.

"You will be home earlier if you ride," she answered. "I suppose you will be home about seven? If you are late though, I will wait dinner."

"I shall be back by seven, sure."

"Very well."

"By the way, who are the visitors you expect this afternoon?"

"Katie Howard and Mollie," Sybil answered quietly, but happening to glance up at him at the moment, she saw her husband start and a deep red flush mount to his brow. A pang shot through her heart, and a swift rush of anger against him and against Mollie swept over her. She drew herself away from his side and stood staring out of the window without seeing anything.

What was this secret of her husband's? the secret with which Mollie Stuart was so evidently mixed up, but of which she—his wife—knew absolutely nothing?

There was only one key to the mystery, so far as she could discover; and woman-like, she seized upon it at once as the right one. Arthur had loved Mollie, and sought to win her for his wife, in those by-gone days at Buxly; she had refused him for Neal Despard; hence Arthur's hatred of them both.

This was Sybil Macdonald's solution of the mystery; and though her nature was far too noble a one to condescend to petty jealousy, it was a somewhat bitter thought that Mollie's name had still power to agitate her husband. She did not quite believe in his protestations of dislike for Miss Mollie Stuart; though she did believe that he had thoroughly hated Neal.

There was one thing that puzzled and troubled her more than anything else. If Arthur had ceased to care for Mollie when he married her—Sybil, what then was the cause of his sudden and swift descent into a life of wild dissipation and vice, compared to which his youthful follies were as nothing? Had his old love for Mollie revived? and was it this sinful secret which was gradually drawing him to ruin?

Sybil shed many bitter tears as she thought over these things day after day, and sometimes a bitter thought of Mollie would creep into her heart, but only to be forcibly ejected, as her common sense and her innate justness of

thought showed her how foolish and ungenerous it was to blame the girl for what she could not help. Mollie certainly detested her husband; Sybil told herself, and that very hatred of him, indeed, had often irritated her, almost unconsciously against Mollie. Still hard thought, of her *would* intrude time and again, valiantly as she fought against them, and knowing this, Sybil was always kinder and more friendly when she and Mollie met. It proved that she had a truly noble nature and a firm control over herself.

It was Arthur who broke the silence that followed. "Miss Stuart does not often honor our establishment with her presence," he remarked with a sneer.

"I have no doubt you know the reason why," answered his wife, looking at him calmly; and again she winced, as she saw his face flush, and his eyes turn inquisitively to her face, as though seeking there a hidden meaning to her words.

"Oh! I presume you refer to our mutual affection; well certainly—"

"There is the lunch bell," interrupted his wife, and she swept haughtily from the room.

The meal was rather an uncomfortable one, and Arthur excused himself as soon as possible and went up-stairs to prepare for his ride. When he descended again, Sybil was waiting in the hall to bid him good-bye.

"I wish, Arthur you would not buy that horse," she said once more, as they stood together.

"It may not suit me," he replied, smiling, "but if it does I shall certainly buy it, if for no other reason than to show you how foolish your tears are. My dear Sybil, I am not a boy, that you need fear for my safety."

"Well," sighing, "I hope Firebrand will not suit you."

"And I hope he will; good-bye, I must be off."

He stooped and kissed her, for the second time that day; and Sybil clasped her arms around his neck with a convulsive pressure.

"Good bye, dearest, and do take care of yourself."

"All right," he answered with a laugh, and the next moment he was on Sultan's back and riding out of the gate; then Sybil went back into the house and shut the door, with a dim foreboding of coming evil; the shadow of a cloud that was drifting slowly across her pathway.

It was after three o'clock when her visitors made their appearance, and after disposing of their out-door garments, settled themselves cosily in the morning room with their hostess, each with some dainty piece of work in hand, and commenced one of those interminable conversations, so dearly appreciated by the feminine mind; on the affairs of their households: of Katie's babies, Mollie's Bertie and Lesley and Sybil's Kenneth.

Leaving them to chat away the afternoon after this fashion, let you and I, reader, take the road to Weston and see what happened there.

It was about five o'clock, perhaps not quite so late; when Arthur Macdonald rode rapidly homeward. The horse he bestrode was not Sultan; this was a finer beast than Sultan had ever been, even in his palmiest days. Firebrand was, perhaps, not so pretty to look at as his predecessor; he was an immense, long-legged animal with fiery, wicked eyes, that looked mischief out of their corners "like the devil," as old Marks said to Mr. Macdonald.

"Aye, he's just Satan and no mistake; so I warn you Mr. Macdonald afore you conclude to buy him."

But Mr. Macdonald, in no wise disconcerted by this warning, merely laughed and replied that if such was his nature he must have a name to match, and that henceforth his name would be "Satan" in lieu of "Firebrand" and that he would soon have the satisfaction of proving to Mr Marks that he was capable of controlling his Satanic Majesty.

"Well sir," if you are determined to buy the horse, so be it; but never say I didna' warn you of his devilish temper."

"Oh no; that's all right," was the reply, as Arthur, who was a true lover of horses; viewed with glistening eyes the magnificent animal before him.

"By Jove! what a sensation he would make in town! no other fellow in Toronto would have a horse like it." So the purchase was concluded, and leaving orders for Sultan to be taken back to town the following day, Arthur Macdonald mounted "Satan," otherwise "Firebrand" and rode away to his fate.