



be married. I was then a curate and had not much money to spare, but I just received a legacy of rather less than a hundred pounds, and in a fit of extravagance, hardly excusable even in a lover of five-and-twenty, I spent the whole of it and a few pounds more in purchasing a ring for my future wife. We expected the engagement to be a long one, but the rector of the parish died suddenly, and my great uncle, in whose gift the living was, presented it to me. The rector's death occurred in February. I read myself in on Easter Sunday and on the first of June was married.

"I suppose that every newly married husband and wife think themselves the happiest people in the world, but I honestly believe that we really were so. We had not only each other, but everything else that we desired—a larger income than we needed, work that was thoroughly congenial to both, a few real friends, a large number of pleasant acquaintances, and an utter freedom from all anxiety.

"This unalloyed happiness endured six months, when my wife's health failed in a mysterious manner. She became subject to strange fits of languor, physical depression and drowsiness, which gradually lasted longer and grew more frequent. I procured medical advice at once, but the doctors seemed completely baffled. The vital organs, they said, were perfectly sound, and although the action of the heart was not quite so strong as it should be, there was absolutely nothing to account for the peculiar symptoms. At best, they could only recommend tonics, gentle open air exercise and an occasional stimulant. In spite of all, however, my wife grew worse. At last she was confined to her bed, and she had not been so a week when one evening I left her in apparently much the same condition as usual, and went into my study to devote a couple of hours to my next Sunday morning's sermon. I had been downstairs only about three-quarters of an hour when my wife's sister, who had been sitting with her during my absence, hastily entered the room and frantically exclaimed: 'Oh, James, she's dead! Our darling Kate's dead!' You can imagine the shock I experienced; still I did not believe that what she said was true. I thought that my sister-in-law's anxiety had been too much for the poor girl's nerves, and that she had temporarily lost her reason. I did my best to calm her and soon succeeded, for she began to talk so lucidly that I was compelled not only to listen, but to give heed to what she said.

"She told me that she and one of the servants had been watching by my wife, who was apparently sleeping peacefully, when they were both startled by a peculiar change in her countenance. They listened for the sound of her breathing, but heard nothing. They then held a hand mirror to her lips, but it remained unclouded. They felt for the pulsations of her heart, but it had ceased to beat, and her body was deathly cold. The servant, she said, had gone to tell one of the men to saddle a horse and summon the nearest doctor, while she had come to tell me the terrible news, and bid me be calm.

"Calmness was impossible. I rushed upstairs. I thought they were demented, but I experienced a fear which I must myself dispel. Yet I was so sure that my wife could not be dead, that I opened the door gently and walked softly to the bed in order to avoid alarming her. I leaned over her and said softly, but distinctly: 'Kate, darling, are you asleep?'

"Before I had spoken the last word I was convinced. I

had often seen death and was sure that I knew it too well not to recognize it at a glance. I shrieked, but there was no answer, and I flung myself full length upon the bed in voiceless agony.

"I must have become almost or entirely unconscious, for I knew nothing of the doctor's presence in the room until I felt his hand upon my arm. He said: 'My dear Mr. Fitzpatrick, you must try to bear it like a man and a Christian. Your wife is dead. She has been so more than an hour.'

"How I felt I cannot tell you. I was prostrated with grief, and so continued for three days. The necessary preparations for the funeral were made by my wife's brother, and I was unaware of what had been done. On the evening of the third day I heard muffled footsteps ascending the stairs and I felt rather than knew that they were the footsteps of the men who had come to close my wife's coffin. I heard the door open; then for a few minutes there was silence. I then heard other and lighter footsteps descending, and they were followed by a tap on my study door. When the door opened I saw that the intruder upon my grief was an old nurse of my wife, who had come to see her living and found her dead.

"'If you please, sir,' she said, giving my wife the old familiar name, 'they cannot get the rings off Kate's finger, and they want to know what to do.'

"I had been apathetic, but in a moment I was indignant, and shouted: 'Leave them on!' in tones that made the poor woman beat a terrified retreat. I was completely unnerved by what seemed an outrage upon the remains that were so dear to me, but I could not make a more effectual protest, and soon again sank into the lethargy from which I had been aroused. The night progressed as the preceding nights had passed, sleeplessly and wearily. I rose at dawn and sat in the study until noon, when friends came to tell me that the time for the funeral had come and that I must follow my wife to her last home.

"You don't know the rectory well, Mr. Browne," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, addressing himself to his friend, "but you must have passed it. The front door, as you will remember, opens toward the turnpike, but there is a side door through which one can pass from a small storeroom connected with the study directly into the churchyard. My wife was in the habit of using this door very frequently, for there ran from it a path which crossed the churchyard and ended at a stile, which was just opposite the gates of the Grange, then rented by the Hardings, who were my wife's intimate friends. When she returned and found the door fastened, which sometimes happened, she had been accustomed to let me know she was there by a peculiar tapping, and I always let her in. It was through this door, which somehow seemed to belong to her, that I followed her to her grave, and when it was gently closed behind me I think I fully realized for the first time how changed my life must henceforth be.

"The service was soon ended. I heard the clods fall upon the coffin and then I returned to the house that was as solitary as it had formerly been cheerful. The vicar of the next parish, who had performed the last sad offices of the church for my wife, returned with me, and earnestly endeavored to restore me to a sense of my duty, but I refused to be comforted. At last he left me, and I was glad to be alone, for in solitude I could feel that my wife was somewhere near me. The servants