

quite quiet as she spoke—"very well, Sid, just as you please. I'm sorry I made such a fuss about it," and with a little mirthless laugh, she was gone.

"Can't understand what's come over the girl," muttered Sidney; "She usen't to be so unreasonable and capricious—women are strange creatures, anyhow," and comforting himself with this philosophical tid-bit, he took up his book again.

PART III

The ten days were nearly over, and today Frank Vereker would leave for Marseilles. The trio dined alone in their private room that night, and Sidney and Frank found scarcely a word to say. But if they were silent, Esme did talking enough for all three of them; in fact, so high were her spirits and gay her laughter, that Sidney felt vexed at her want of consideration; it seemed almost as though she was anxious to show his old chum how glad she was at the prospect of his near departure.

But the meal came to an end at last, and Sidney proposed they should take a carriage and drive to the Bois de Boulogne. Ten minutes later saw them rolling smoothly over the main avenue. The carriage was dismissed and they strolled toward the less frequented paths.

The moon was shedding a silvery light on the leafless trees and threw strange shadows from their gaunt and outstretched arms; the air, too, despite the fact that the month was November, was warm and still. At times the brilliant light would be obscured by huge masses of heavy clouds, and at those times the atmosphere seemed oppressive and in the dark depths of the Bois imagination pictured figures, weird and unearthly.

They were passing one of the rustic seats and talking of the coming winter, when an old gentleman rose quickly and touched Sidney on the arm. "Mr. Harton, you are the very man I wanted to see. I called at your hotel this afternoon, but you were out. Can you spare me five minutes now? I will not detain you longer."

"Strangely enough, I went round to the bank to see you today," said Sidney, smiling. "You go on, Esme, I will join you in a few minutes." He nodded smiling to his wife, and the two walked slowly on. Once alone with Vereker, Esme seemed struck with the same silence which had oppressed her husband and his friend, and for some time each was occupied with his or her own thoughts.

Esme's thoughts were full of pain and shame that she, the proud, indifferent girl, the Esme who used to scoff at anything approaching sentimental attachment, should be so drawn to the tall man walking at

her side, a man whose strong, true face called for the confidence and love of her woman's heart, and to have that heart bound for life to one she liked but could never love! Her husband's true, unerring devotion and deference to her slightest wish were forgotten in the wild pain of confessing to herself that her soul had awakened *too late*, and the idol of her heart was, within a few short hours, to leave her forever.

And Frank—how was his mind occupied? He, too, had learned his lesson, and, though his greatest desire was to take the woman at his side to his heart, and tell her all, his honor, his fealty to his friend, bade him keep silence, and to the monotonous, muffled sound of their footsteps on the leaf strewn path, kept time the hopeless reiteration in his soul,— "She is Sidney's wife, Sidney's wife, Sidney's wife." Then the moon shown out brightly and the path took a turn to the left. With one accord they stood irresolute and looked into each others eyes.

Love's eyes are keen. "O God!" murmured Vereker, clenching his hands and setting his teeth hard, while he bent his head low to look in her face; "O God! and I may not even touch you."

Then came a terrible temptation to him, one that made him draw his breath in short, quick gasps, while his face turned ashy pale. She came close to him, laid her white, ungloved hands on his breast and held her beautiful face up close to his.

"Don't," he gasped, "for God's sake, don't! I cannot bear it. Your husband! Think!

But she did not move. Her face was almost touching his own; as he bent low in his agony her perfumed hair brushed against him; the exquisite lips were close to his as she whispered, "don't leave me or my heart will break." Then the man's passion overcame him, the temptation was too strong. He was but mortal and, on the impulse of the moment, he caught her in his arms and held her close, close to his wildly beating heart. "Esme, my love! my darling! fate has been very cruel to us, but we must abide by it; kiss me once, my sweet, and then goodbye for ever."

He lifted the drooping head and took the beautiful face between his two hands, gazing sorrowfully on the only woman he could ever love. Their lips met in one passionate, clinging kiss; then with a low moan she covered her face with her hands and shrank away from him. The clouds had covered the moon again and all was dark, while the low mutterings of distant thunder heralded the coming storm. The wind was moaning pitiously through the leafless boughs and making fit accompaniment to their thoughts, as they stood apart, too full for words.