

THE HARD WOMAN IN WHITE

Repented When Confronted by the Mild Woman in Gray.

Story of Early Love, Marriage and a Husband's Weakness for Something He Did Not Have.

The woman in white had passed through a most triumphant day and was weary. She tossed her hat to a bed, her gloves and fan to a chair, and she herself dropped into the great willow rocker—a mass of fluffy white draperies, her deerlike head, with its crown of red brown hair, lifted above the foam. The woman in white had been younger, but she had never before been so beautiful.

Because she had won him—and because she had no right to him. Because he had once scorned and flouted her and had passed her with his wife in his arm and a look of cold contempt in his eyes, and because now he had followed her for days and days, and she had made him sue for a kind word from her—her, the scorned and despised. Because she had laughed in his face and had baited and lured him until he had thrown to the winds his decent life and all the long years of uprightness and the position among men for which he had struggled, and was ready to follow her to the world's end, and because he was the one man whose scorn had cut deep into what she called her soul!

She looked at the radiant thing in the mirror and laughed and turned the flashing bracelet about and around on her wrist, and a something almost womanly came into her face as she realized that it was not the diamonds she cared for—no! She would have loved a ribbon if he had given it to her with that look on his face and would have kissed it as she did this, with a passionate delight.

And the woman in gray, standing in the door, saw her kissing the bracelet. "May I talk with you a few minutes?" asked the woman in gray; and the woman in white saw her reflection in the mirror. What she saw was a slender, gray clad woman, with a pale, pale face, and dark eyes with darker shadows under them, and brown hair that was beginning to whiten with early frost.

The woman in white stared insolently at the reflection in the mirror and smiled.

"I don't know what my servants can be thinking of," she said without turning. "I really have nothing for you, my good woman. Perhaps if you go down some of my people will show you the way out."

"But I must see you for a little while," said the woman in gray, putting aside the insult and coming slowly nearer, and there was a deadly stillness about her as she drew a chair forward and sat down in it. Then they looked at each other—the woman in gray and the woman in white.

"I think perhaps you know me," said the woman in gray. "No doubt people have pointed me out to you as the wife of—"

"They have," said the woman in white haughtily, taking up a steel paper knife from the table near at hand and playing with it. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

The woman in gray looked at the paper knife and smiled wearily. "You mistake me," she said. "Some women might have thought of that. But you will live. See! Tomorrow I go upon a long journey, and I knew that I must see you face to face before I went."

"What possible interest can I have in your plans for traveling?" cried the woman in white contemptuously. "Pray consult your dressmaker instead and tell her for me that she should be killed if she ever dresses you in gray again. It is not becoming."

"You are bitter," said the woman in gray, "and we have so little time, and we are so near the tragedies of both our lives. A little while ago I was bitter against you, too, but now I am too sad to be very bitter. I see how past remedy it is. I am not here to beg you to be merciful. Even if you wished, you couldn't give me back what I have lost."

"Well, you have had your chance!" cried the woman in white. "And you have lost it! Who but yourself is to blame?"

The woman in white had thrown prudence to the winds with that speech, and now rage and jealousy and insolent triumph were curiously blended in the beautiful face and flushed in a red glow from the eyes.

"Yes—I have lost it," said the woman in gray. "And having learned this, past all doubt, I would not try to keep him if I could. I am going away, and he shall live his life in peace. I have merely come to ask you what kind of life it is going to be."

The woman in white threw herself back in her chair and raised her beautiful arms above her head.

"Oh, you cold blooded woman!" she cried, clasping her hands above the shining coil of her hair. "You icy wives that go your round of what you call 'duties,' and sew on buttons and have good dinners and sit at the head of the table, as interesting as that Dresden shepherdess, month after month and year after year, and then are shocked and outraged when he meets a flesh and blood woman and loves her! What kind of life will he have? Why, he will learn for the first time that he is alive! What right have women like you to talk about love—women who give a man up the first time he looks another way! Why, I would make myself the most beautiful and most attractive creature in the world to him, so that he could never even look at another woman—and then, if he looked, I would not go away and leave him. I would kill him!"

She clutched the paper knife in her right hand, and lifted the left hand and kissed again the flashing circlet on her wrist. The woman in gray looked at her, and the sight was branded on her memory. When she spoke again, it was in lower tones. Her eyes were fixed on a ring—a loose, loose ring that she was turning around on her finger.

"Perhaps we were mistaken about having loved each other," she said absently, as though she were talking to herself. "We were both so young, and so ignorant. We were married earlier than we had intended—because my mother died, and I was left alone, and was such an unprotected child—and so we were married, and we agreed that we were to study together, because we were both so ambitious—for him. And perhaps I couldn't have kept pace with him, at my best, but I had to take in sewing to help him along, so I hadn't much time—and in a little while he was away beyond me. I have never caught up with him since, but I have always gone on studying, so that I wouldn't quite disgrace him when he became a distinguished man."

The woman in gray stopped to put a delicate and tremulous hand to her throat.

"When he was studying law," she went on presently, "his eyes were troubling him, and so I read aloud to him for many hours every day. Sometimes I almost wished his eyes would fall a little more—a great deal more—so that he could be more dependent on me, for I was very young and ignorant then, and, you see, I thought I loved him!"

The woman in white did not speak. She was sitting quite still, as though she were a marble woman.

"And even away back at the first," the woman in gray went on in that desolate self-communing, "when we were ignorant boy and girl together, we had quite settled it with ourselves that he was to be a distinguished man. We even made a little play of it, telling one another that people would one day point out with pride the poor little house where we had lived and where we had so much trouble paying the rent, and then we would laugh so merrily. Oh, where has the laughter all gone? And so we went on looking forward always to the day when he would be famous and working and planning for it, and I always pictured myself so proud—so proud of his triumphs! We cold blooded women feel very deeply sometimes and think long thoughts! And now he has won the honors we dreamed of, and tomorrow I am going on a long journey!"

She slowly rose, and the marble woman in white saw for the first time that she had a little package in the thin hand.

"I have something to leave with you," said the woman in gray, "something to give you. See, it is a little bundle of letters. He wrote them during my mother's illness. They are the letters of an undeveloped and ignorant boy to a poor little girl. I have cherished them a long time, but I give them to you now, because—because they have already gone out of my life."

An hour afterward the woman in white found that she had been alone for a long time and that the last of the poor little letters was open in her hand. A withered rose had dropped from it and lay in her lap among the folds of fluffy white. The air was filled with the fragrance of the little old time rose, which seemed to be part of the old time boyish love that was dead as the rose. Once, long ago, in her life also—

The radiant face of the woman in white was pale and old and weary looking as she tied the letters in the packet again and laid this penciled line upon them:

"Do not go on the long journey, for I go on a journey of my own." Then she slipped the bracelet into its velvet case and sealed and addressed it and called a servant to go on two errands.

"I am going away tonight, John," she said as his foot hesitated on the stair. "Send Susan up to pack."

And then she stood in the middle of the room, her head drooped, pressing back something that tried to come to her eyes.

"And now for new fields," she said despairingly, "and the life in them!"

—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

He Was Admitted.
Fortunately when red tape comes in contact with common sense it is red tape which goes to the wall. A good story is told of a military official who

devised a system which compelled every one who went on business to General Banks to procure a ticket from a member of the staff, the presentation of which at the door gained his admission. One day a burly colonel came to the door of the private office at headquarters and requested that his name be given to the general.

"Have you a ticket?" he was asked. "A ticket!" echoed the colonel, with scorn. "No, sir, I haven't."

"You can't enter here without one," was the reply.

"Sir," said the colonel, "when General Banks becomes a puppet show, and I have 25 cents to spare, I'll buy a ticket to see him, not before." He was admitted.

WHY SHE DIDN'T SING.

Superstition Kept Her From Becoming a Prima Donna.

"I have come across a great deal of foolishness of varying degrees and kinds in my life," said the man who teaches singing, "but in all my born days I never before met anybody as hopelessly feeble minded as a young woman I have been taking an interest in lately. She is a stenographer by occupation, and I happened to hear her hum a popular song one day when I was in her employer's office. Of course the production of her tones was all wrong, but her voice was as soft as velvet and big and deep and clear as a cathedral bell. It was a voice such as a teacher doesn't get a chance to work on twice in a lifetime."

"I went to her and asked her to let me try her voice. It proved to be better than I had hoped. It was magnificent. I wanted her to begin studying at once. She had no money, but I didn't want money for bringing out a voice like that. She hadn't much time either, and she told me she was too tired to sing in the evenings after working all day. I told her to get up early and practice an hour or two before breakfast. I thought she looked odd when I told her to do it, but she didn't say she wouldn't."

"Weeks passed, and her method continued as bad as ever. I couldn't understand it. Each lesson found her just where the preceding one left her. At last one day I asked her if she were she wouldn't practice before breakfast flushed and then broke down. She said she hadn't dared to sing before breakfast because it is bad luck."

"Sing before you eat, cry before you sleep," is the saying, and that idiot of a girl believed it so implicitly that she wouldn't practice before breakfast even for the sake of that glorious voice of hers, and as before breakfast was the only time she had to practice the result was—well, I gave her up. She'll live and die a stenographer when she might be a prima donna, and it will serve her precisely right. She has sacrificed her future to an idiotic superstition."—Washington Post.

A SERENADE OF WOLVES.

How One Was Started in the National Zoo at Washington.

In The Century Ernest Seton-Thompson, who used to be known as "Wolf" Thompson from his familiarity with this particular form of wild animal, tells how he started a wolf serenade at the National zoo in Washington.

While making these notes among the animals of the Washington zoo I used to go at all hours to see them. Late one evening I sat down with some friends by the wolf-cages in the light of a full moon. I said, "Let us see whether they have forgotten the music of the west." I put up my hands to my mouth and howled the hunting song of the pack. The first to respond was a coyote from the plains. He remembered the wild music that used to mean pickings for him. He put up his muzzle and "yap yapped" and howled. Next an old wolf from Colorado came running out, looked and listened earnestly, and, raising her snout to the proper angle, she took up the wild strain. Then all the others came running out and joined in, each according to his voice, but all singing that wild wolf hunting song, howling and yelling, rolling and swelling, high and low, in the cadence of the hills.

They sang me their song of the west, the west; They set all my feelings aglow; They stirred up my heart with their artless art And their song of the long ago.

Again and again they raised the cry and sang in chorus till the whole moonlit wood around was ringing with the grim refrain—until the inhabitants in the near city must have thought all the beasts broken loose. But at length their clamor died away, and the wolves returned, slunk back to their dens, silently, sadly, I thought, as though they realized that they could indeed join in the hunting song as of old, but their hunting days were forever done.

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