



(Written for The Prairie.)

PART I.

IT was five o'clock in the morning. The month was June, and the garden was full of roses, crimson, yellow and cream. The sun shone brightly on the weary old world, flooding the red brick house at the end of the lane with golden radiance, and sparkling like a thousand diamonds among the dewdrops on the lawn. But the old brick house still slept, and silence reigned supreme. One person only was awake, though one would not have thought so to look at her, as she lay face downwards on her bed, with the wealth of hair falling about her and her lovely head pillowed on her arm. Half past five struck by the big clock in the hall, and Esme roused herself.

"Half past five! How quickly the night has passed, and here I have been lying, think, think, thinking all the time—oh, well! I suppose there is no getting out of it now, and after all I believe I am fond of him, anyway, I *like* him and that will have to do."

She yawned, rose from the bed and threw open the window. The sweet, fresh air came fluttering in, bearing with it the scent of roses and mignonette, and as Esme drank in great draughts of it the color came back to her cheeks and the gray lines round her eyes vanished. It was her wedding morning and she was utterly indifferent to it. She neither loved nor hated her future husband. As she told herself a dozen times a day, she "liked him," and surely that was enough. She didn't believe in these absurd love matches; they always turned out badly.

With this Sidney Harton was fain to be content, and trusted that his beautiful fiancée would in time yield him her heart. She was very charming, very beautiful, and womanly too; why should he despair of making her love him? He did not despair; he felt sure of bringing the love-light into her eyes before many months of their married life had passed away.

So, on that fair June morning, the parson joined together for better or for worse, till death did them part, the hands, if not the hearts, of Esme West and Sidney Harton. Esme shivered a little as she repeated the solemn words, but Sidney's voice rang out strong and hopefully.

PART II.

Mr. and Mrs. Harton sat in their private room at the Hotel Bristol, Paris, and wondered when the weather would clear up. They had been married a year now, and things were not looking as well as Sidney had hoped. His wife was always charming, always pleasant, but he knew that, hard as he had tried, he had never gained her love, sometimes he even doubted that he ever should.

Suddenly Esme threw down her book. "Sid, I'm tired of Paris, let's go home."

"Tired of Paris," exclaimed Sidney, who looked upon the gay French capital as a veritable "City of Delights"; "I didn't know anybody *could* be tired of Paris. Why didn't you tell me before, Esme? Of course we'll go home if you want to. I'll telegraph Mrs. Ross to have the house aired; how soon shall I say they are to expect us?"

"Oh, tomorrow, today; as soon as possible," said Esme, petulantly, rising as she spoke to look out of the window. Sidney paused a minute.

"Esme, dear, are you not rather unreasonable," he said quietly. "You know I told Frank Vereker we would be here for three weeks, and he promised to spend ten days with us before he went to Melbourne. We can hardly give him the slip like that, and he is due tomorrow. As soon as he leaves we will go straight home, if you like, though, I certainly understood you to say you wanted to spend the winter in Nice. Poor old Frank! I'm awfully sorry he's going, and I wouldn't miss seeing him for anything."

The last sentence was spoken with a good deal more decision than Sidney employed as a rule, when addressing his wife; he hated to cross her in any way, but Frank Vereker; Frank, his old college chum; Frank, his old champion and playmate of long ago, let *him* go to Australia for good, without so much as a hand shake or "God speed you" from his oldest friend—the thing was absurd, impossible.

"It is too bad, upon my word, Sidney, to consider your friend before your wife; I tell you I am sick of this place; I want to go home, do you hear? I want to go home and I want to go **TODAY!**"

Esme turned from the window as she spoke, pale with excitement, and emphasized her words with a slight stamp of her pretty foot.

"I am sorry," said Sidney, coldly, "but I am afraid you must make up your mind to stay here another ten days," and lighting a cigarette, he tilted back his chair and watched the little rings of smoke ascending to the ceiling.

His wife stood still a minute, looking fixedly at him, and then walked slowly to the door. She turned before crossing the threshold and her voice was