

MARIA DALE

consternation prevailed in the little house until the return of the stage which brought a parcel containing the coat but not the pocket-book, which Maria hopefully assured her father would arrive by special messenger the following day. The next day, however, brought no tidings, and the suspense of both became so intense that a parcel containing Albert's coat, together with a letter requesting the return of the book, was despatched by a friendly villager, who brought back a letter denying all knowledge of the pocket-book. A week later the mortgage was foreclosed, and on the day of its foreclosure broken-hearted John Dale slipped away from life's cares, leaving Maria to face the grim future, which was somewhat softened when arrangements were made whereby for a modest rental she was given use of the cottage and garden which she loved so well.

Of Albert's innocence she never doubted but, obeying the last wish of her father, the little betrothal ring was returned to him.

And now, after fifteen years, proof of his innocence lay before her, although she had never doubted it once through the lonely, bitter years of schooled indifference.

That evening as she sat at the neatly arranged tea table she drained the tea drops from the old willow-patterned cup and, looking at the tea leaves, she suddenly caressed the old Maltese, who from time to time reached up a velvet paw.

"Yes, Peter, the cup says I'm to take a trip to the