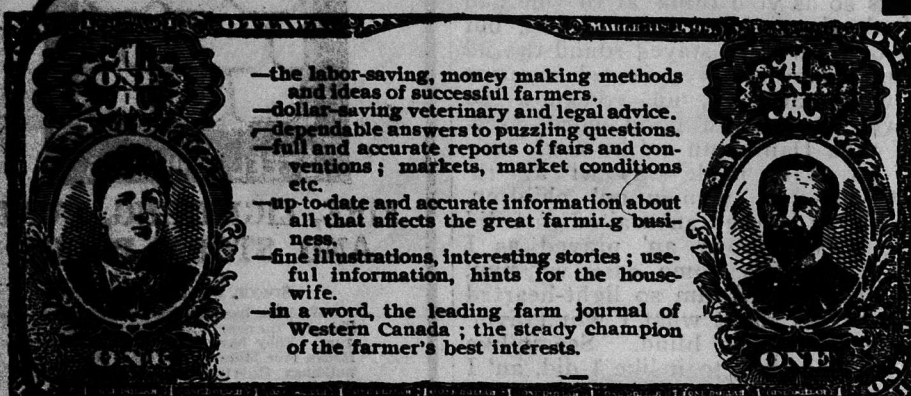


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canst get thee gone or I'll go mysen. Tha knows't me well enow to know I'll ne'er forgie thee for what tha's done. Aye"—with the passionate hand-wringing again—"but that wunnot undo it."

He rose and came to her, trembling like a man with the ague.

"Yo dunnot mean that theer, Meg," he said slowly. "You dunnot mean it word fur word. Think a bit."

"Aye, but I do," she answered him, setting her white teeth, "word fur word."

"Think again, wench." And this time he staggered and caught hold of the door-post. "Is there nowt as'll go agen th' wrong? I've lived wi' thee nigh a year, an' loved thee twenty—is there nowt fur me? Aye, lass, dunnot be too hard. Tha was ullus harder than most womankind; try an' be a bit softer like to'rd th' mon as risked his soul because he war a mon an' darena lose thee. Tha laid thy head on my shoulder last neet. Aye, lass—lass, think o' that fur one minnit."

Perhaps she did think of it, for surely she faltered a little—what woman would not have faltered at such a moment?—but the next, the memory of the sunny, half-boyish face she had clung to with so strong a love, rushed back upon her and struck her to the heart. She remembered the days when her life had seemed so full that she had feared her own bliss; she remembered the gallant speeches and light-hearted wiles, and all at once she cried out in a fierce impassioned voice: "I'll ne'er forgie thee," she said—"I'll ne'er forgie thee to th' last day o' my life. What for should I? Tha's broke my heart, thou villin!" And the next minute she had pushed past him and rushed into the house.

For a minute or so after she was gone the man stood leaning against the door with a dazed look in his pale face. She meant what she said; he had known her long enough to understand that she never forgave—never forgot. Her unbroken will and stubborn strength had held her to enmities all her life, and he knew that she was not to be won by such things as won other women. He knew she was harder than most women, but his dull nature could not teach him how bitter must have been the life that rendered her so. He had never thought of it—he did not think of it now. He was not blaming her, and he was scarcely blaming himself. He had tried to make her happy and had failed. There were two causes for the heavy passion of misery that was ruling him, but neither of them was remorse.

His treachery had betrayed him, and he had lost the woman he had loved and worked for. Soul and body were sluggish alike, but each had its dull pang of weight and wretchedness.

"I've come to th' eend now surely," he said, and, dropping into her seat, he hid his face.

As he sat there a choking lump rose in his throat with a sudden click, and in a minute or so more he was wiping away hot rolling tears with the back of his rough hand.

"I'm forsook, somehow," he said—"aye, I'm forsook. I'm not th' soart o' chap to tak' up wi' th' world. She wor all th' world I cared fur, an' she'll ne'er forgie me, for she's a hard un—she is. Aye! but I wur fond o' her! I wonder what she'll do—I do wonder i' my soul what she's gettin' her mind on!"

It did not occur to him to call to her or go and see what she was doing. He had always stood in some dull awe of her, even when she had been kindest, and now it seemed that they were too far apart for any possibility of approach at reconciliation. So he sat and pondered heavily, the sea air blowing upon him fresh and sweet, the sun shining soft and warm upon the house, and the few common flowers in the strip of garden whose narrow shell walks and borders he had laid out for her himself with much clumsy planning and slow labor.

Then he got up and took his rough working-jacket over his arm.

"I mun go down to th' Mary Anne," he said, "an' work a bit, or we'll ne'er get her turned afore th' tide comes in. That boat's a moit o' trouble." And he sighed heavily.

Half-way to the gate he stopped before a cluster of ground honeysuckle, and perhaps for the first time in his life was conscious of a sudden curious admiration for them.

"She's powerful fond o' such like bits o' things—posies an' such like," he said. "Them's some as I planted to please her on th' very day as we were wed. I'll tak' one or two. She's most fond on 'em—fur such a hard un."

And when he went out he held in his hand two or three slender stems hung with the tiny, pretty, humble bells. Who knows whether some subtle influence at work in soul or body, or even the air he breathed, did not prompt the novel mood.

He had these very bits of simple blossoms in his hand when he went down to where the Mary Anne lay on the beach for repairs. So his fellow-workmen said when they told the story afterward, remembering even this trivial incident.

He was in a strange frame of mind, too, they noticed, silent and heavy and absent. He did not work well, but lagged over his labor, stopping every now and then to pass the back of his hand over his brow as if to rouse himself.

"Yo look as if yo and th' missus had had a fallin' out an' yo'n gotten th' worst o' th' bargain," one of his comrades said by way of rough jest.

They were fond of joking with him about his love for his handsome, taciturn wife. But he did not laugh this time as he usually did.

"Mind thy own tackle, lad," he said, dully, "an' I'll mind mine."

From that time he worked steadily among them until it was nearly time for the tide to rise. The boat they were repairing had been a difficult job to manage, as they could only work between tides, and now being hurried they lingered longer than usual. At the last minute they found it must be moved, and so were detained.

"Nay," they argued, "it'll be all to do o'er again if we do that. Theer's plents o' time if we look sharp enow. Heave again, lads."

Then it was that with the help of straining and tugging there came a little lurch, and then it was that as the Mary Anne slipped over on her side one of the workers slipped with her, slipped half underneath her with a cry, and lay on the sand, held down by the weight that rested on him.

With his cry there broke out half a dozen others, and the men rushed up to him with frightened faces.

"Are yo hurt, Seth, lad?" they cried. "Are yo crushed or owt?"

The poor fellow stirred a little and then looked up at them pale enough.

"Bruised a bit," he answered them, "an' sick a bit, but I dunnot think theer's any bones broke. Look sharp, chaps, an' heave her up. She's a moit o' weight on me."

They went to work again one and all, so relieved by his words that they were doubly strong, but after toiling like giants for a while they were compelled to pause for breath. In falling the boat had so buried herself in the sand that she was harder to move than ever. It had seemed simple enough at first, but it was not so simple after all. With all their efforts they had scarcely stirred her an inch, and their comrade's position interfered with almost every plan suggested. Then they tried again, but this time with less effect than before through their fatigue. When they were obliged to pause they looked at each other questioningly, and more than one of them turned a trifle paler, and at last the wisest of them spoke out.

"Lads," he said, "we canna do this oursens. Run for help, Jem Coulter, an' run wi' thy might, for it wunnot be so long before th' tide'll flow."

Up to this time the man on the