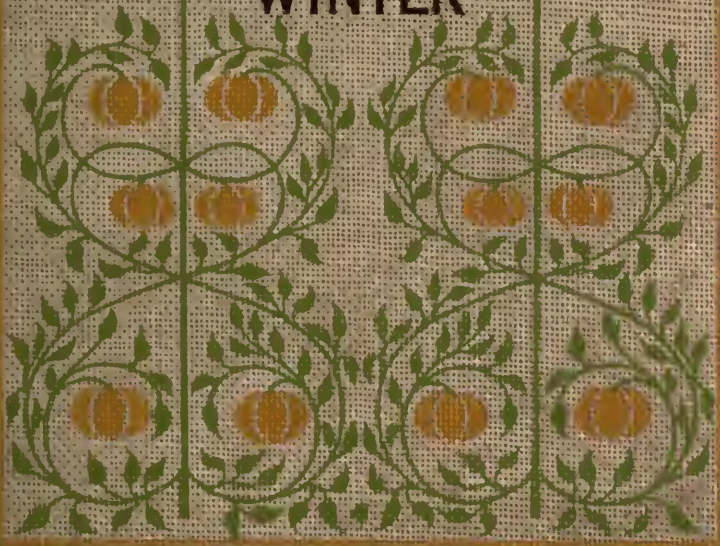




# WEDLOCK

JOHN  
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BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

Author of "Bootle's Baby," "Grip," "Into an Unknown World,"  
"The Truth Tellers," Etc., Etc.



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# WEDLOCK

## CHAPTER I

### THE DINNER OF HERBS

“I HAVE great news for you, Mary ; Captain Conway has been here.”

“Captain Conway—yes! And what did he want, mother? What news did he bring?”

Mary Hamilton took off her black straw hat as she spoke and pushed the hair away from her forehead with a weary gesture. Mrs. Hamilton busied herself with the simple tea-table, assiduously arranging plates, setting the teaspoons straight in the saucers, laying the butter-knife at an exact angle, and smoothing away an infinitesimal crease in the white cloth.

“He—he—he made a suggestion to me, Mary,” she began, nervously.

“A suggestion!” Mary Hamilton sat down and eyed her mother expectantly. “You don’t mean that he proposed to you, mother,” she exclaimed.

“Something very like it,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, still keeping herself very busy with the table.

For a moment there was silence between them; Mary Hamilton sat looking with astonishment at her mother and at last she spoke.

“I suppose it wouldn’t be a bad thing in the mere way of money, mother,” she said, slowly. “But—but—oh, mother dear, you could never bring yourself to do it.”

For the first time Mrs. Hamilton turned and looked straight at her daughter. “My dear child,” she exclaimed—“you don’t understand.

There is no question of *my* marrying Captain Conway—it is—at least he never—besides my devotion to your poor father’s memory should have kept you from jumping to any such conclusion. Captain Conway is a good man, and any woman might be honored in marrying him, but my heart is in the grave and—and besides, he did not propose, he does not propose that *I* should consider the question of becoming his wife.”

Mary Hamilton stared open-eyed at her mother. “Dear mother,” she said, gently—“I am tired to-night—the children were very troublesome to-day and the rooms seemed more stuffy than usual. I feel confused. Do tell me just what Captain Conway did suggest to you.”

Mrs. Hamilton began to pour out the tea with a vehemence which showed how perturbed in mind she was. “Your poor father

always said that I was injudicious in telling news," she cried, in honest self-abasement. "I ought to have seen that you were tired. Here is your tea, darling. Drink it at once and have another cup to go on with. The truth is, Mary, that Captain Conway has flurried me till I hardly know whether I am standing on my head or my heels and—and I never gave a thought to your being tired out with that hateful school,—oh, to think that *my* daughter should ever have been a board-school mistress, not one remove from a National school, and your poor father a clergyman in Holy Orders."

"My dear mother, do explain yourself," said Mary, a fearful sense of coming evil gradually overspreading her.

"Oh, my darling," cried the older woman, "it's all over now—all the drudgery, all the pinching and the nipping. I've said little or nothing because you were slaving your youth

away in that horrid degrading school but now I may speak, now I may say how bitterly and cruelly I have felt it all, the humiliations, the—the”—

“Dear, there can be no degradation or humiliation in honest work,” said Mary, patiently, and yet with a dignity which sat becomingly on her tired young face. “And what do you mean by its being over? Not surely that Captain Conway wants to marry *me*.”

“Yes—you. And oh, my darling, it has made me so happy,” Mrs. Hamilton cried. “Almost delirious with happiness.”

“My dear mother,” cried Mary, bolting a piece of bread and butter with what was almost a convulsion. “You can’t mean that you would like me to marry Captain Conway?”

“Why not?” asked the mother, blankly.

“I couldn’t do it,” declared the girl, stoutly.

“Couldn’t do it!” Mrs. Hamilton’s voice

rose almost to a scream. "Couldn't do it! Why, dear heaven, surely you would never dream of flying in the face of Providence by refusing him!"

"Certainly, I would."

"He is rich," cried Mrs. Hamilton.

"He is old enough to be my father," said Mary. "And I doubt if he is rich."

"Captain of one of the largest steamships afloat," protested Mrs. Hamilton. "He is exceedingly well-off, he can provide for you *adequately*. He has an excellent position"—

"I don't—couldn't—never could love him," Mary burst out.

"Perhaps not, but you can respect him," cried the mother.

"I don't know that I should even do that much," Mary returned. Then suddenly clasped her hands together and looked appealingly at the excited woman opposite to her.

“Oh, mother, don't you understand why I cannot do this thing? Have you been so unhappy in our little home that you want to sell me to the first bidder? I've been so contented in working for you—has it all been for nothing?”

“Working for me,” Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed, indignantly. “Working for me indeed! And what have *I* done all these years? Look at my hands, worked to the bone—cooking, scrubbing, sewing, contriving, making my own bits of clothes and never a place to show them in in this desolate wilderness of bricks and mortar! No one to associate with, living a pensioner on your bounty, without pleasures, interests or change of any kind. And then to have your work thrown in my teeth, indeed.”

“Oh, mother!”

“It's all very well to say ‘Oh, mother!’ but I'm speaking the truth. All these years I

have struggled and striven for you—and now when you have a chance of letting me end my days in peace, you turn up your nose at a man whom any woman might be honored by marrying.”

“You married for love yourself,” said Mary, in a very low voice.

Mrs. Hamilton caught up the words and echoed them in the high pitched, querulous accents of a thoroughly selfish and superficial person. “Married for love,” she echoed, shrilly. “Yes, and what did love ever do for me? I married for love, married on eighty pounds a year, drudged on it, slaved, toiled, almost starved on it. Don’t talk to me about marrying for love, Mary—love in a cottage is a will-of-the-wisp that leads many people astray and your poor father and I were among the number. Was it natural, right, proper that he should die at thirty-five, a worn-out, pre-



maturely old man, leaving me helpless, homeless, penniless, to struggle on as best I could, to drag you up as best I could? That was what marrying for love did for him, poor fellow. He never would own it, he died with his hand in mine—his last words ‘The Lord will provide,’ and now when provision has come, it is only to be rejected.”

Mary Hamilton sat still while this inconsequent torrent of recollection and vexation poured from her mother’s lips. At the vision of the red-faced, burly, bluff sailor being regarded as a provision sent by the Lord to take her from an independent life of honest work to one of degrading idleness, she almost laughed aloud, but she resolutely choked down the inclination and spoke quietly and reasonably to the excited woman on the other side of the table.

“Dear mother,” she said, gently, “cannot

you for my sake endure this life a little longer? After midsummer we shall be better off. Even now we can well afford to have a woman in to do the rougher work—it has always been for you to decide how the money shall be spent. For my sake, dear?”

“And why not for mine?” asked the mother, fiercely. “Listen—he has laid all his plans before me. You will have a charming house and garden, a couple of good maidservants, a handsome housekeeping purse, an ample allowance for your dress and pocket-money. There will always be room for me—I am to live with you—to give the benefit of my advice, my experience in housekeeping and all such things. You will have as much society as you care to take—there will be no anxiety, no thinking about the rent, or how to get seven days’ dinners out of a certain sum. You will have”—

“Oh, don’t, mother, please don’t,” the girl cried. “I know all these things are a temptation to you—poor dear, it must be to you just like opening a prison door and seeing a lovely view over which you may walk forever on one condition. But the condition, dear mother, the condition. Think! It is that of reaching the fair pathways over your own child’s body, oh, worse, worse, over her very soul. It means the sacrifice of all that is best in your child’s life, the giving up of her freedom, her honor, her ambition, of all her better self. Don’t ask me to do it, dear, pray, pray don’t. I will work—oh, how I will work—how thankfully and gratefully I will bring you every farthing that I make, so that you may be more content, less straitened. Mother dear, speak to me! For my father’s sake say that you won’t urge this upon me.”

But the words of appeal, glowing, passion-

ate, heart-full as they were, failed to touch the shallow nature of the woman who in her day had married for love and had found the dinner of herbs turn to dust and ashes between her teeth. She rested her head dejectedly upon her hand and gave several long-drawn sighs of misery, calculated to move the heart of a stone.

“Dear mother,” murmured Mary from the other side of the table.

But Mrs. Hamilton shook her head resolutely. “No, Mary, it’s no use your saying ‘*dear mother!*’ It’s worth nothing—it means nothing. I can’t make you marry Captain Conway—indeed, I’ve no wish to do so. I can’t make you see what is best for you, although you might trust your own mother to give you good advice on such a subject. I can do nothing but bear my disappointment with resignation and fortitude. After all, it is only one

more bitter pill to swallow, one more drop of bitterness in my cup of humiliation and self-sacrifice. I'll say nothing more, Mary, only—only—don't prate to me about love and devotion. I've proved the value of both to-day. And, after all my struggles to give you the best of education—it's hard—it's heartbreaking."

A sudden thought flashed across Mary Hamilton's mind of certain clerical charities which had from the time of her father's death provided her mother with the wherewithal of living, of the great institution wherein she had received her education free of cost to her mother and because of the position in life which her father had occupied, but she said nothing; she felt that it would be useless.

"So my dream ends," said Mrs. Hamilton, bitterly. "It says somewhere in the Bible—'Her children shall rise up and call her

blessed.' It's a fallacy, nowadays at least, for veneration for parents has gone out of fashion."

Mary Hamilton sat back in her chair wondering whether it would be best to let the storm pass in silence or not. Mrs. Hamilton got up from her place and went blindly toward the door. I say blindly because she went stumblingly and groped her way like a person whose eyes were full of tears. There were, however, no tears in her eyes but a strange sightlessness, as if she had suddenly walked into a heavy sea-fog. Then at the door she stumbled and fell, not the sharp fall of a person tripping by accident but the huddled-up dropping to the ground of one unable any longer to keep her feet.

Mary sprang from her seat with a cry. "Mother—mother—you are ill," she burst out.

The answer came thick and indistinct. "Dying! Dying! You have—killed—me!"

The girl tried to lift the prostrate woman but found herself powerless. She sank upon her knees in an agony of apprehension.

“No—no—mother, don’t say that. Let me help you—only try to get up—I’ll do anything to please you—mother—mother.”

## CHAPTER II

### DONE IN A MOMENT

WHEN Mary Hamilton found that her mother had slipped into utter unconsciousness, she ran to their nearest neighbors and begged them to come in and aid her. So her mother was with no little difficulty lifted from the ground and carried up to her bedroom, and a doctor was quickly sent for. His fiat was given without the smallest hesitation. "It's a stroke," he said, "but it might have been much worse; for instance, if it had been on the other side it would probably have proved fatal almost immediately. As it is, with care, your mother will probably recover and be quite or very nearly herself again."

With care! Mary Hamilton's heart went down to zero as she heard the two little simple



words which give hope to some anxious watchers of the sick, but which open out endless possibilities of unattainable needs to those who are poorly placed in the world. In her case it meant having an experienced person to tend her mother by day and night alike, for be the circumstances of life what they would, her work must go on just the same. With the best intentions in the world she could not be in two places at once—yet—how was she to afford skilled attendance for her mother. It was a terrible question to answer.

At this point the advantages of the alliance which the sick woman had been pressing upon her daughter came prominently into view. During the course of the evening Captain Conway arrived eager and anxious as to his answer, only to be met with the mournful news that Mrs. Hamilton had been seized with a paralytic stroke and was still unconscious.

His first words were a suggestion. "You will want a nurse."

"I shall want some one to look after my mother while I am away at my work," Mary admitted. "For to-night Mrs. Robinson has kindly promised to stay with me—and to-morrow I must find some nice, respectable person"—

"I will send in a proper nurse at once," said the sailor, speaking in rough but kindly accents. "Skilled nursing is half the battle in such cases as these. I never did believe in makeshift nursing, it's the very—the very mischief." He had been going to use another word but changed it out of deference to Mary with a very perceptible effort over the substitution.

"I can't let you," began Mary, at which he put up his hand imperatively.

"Now, Miss Mary, none of that, if you

please. I'm your friend, and friends are allowed to make themselves useful to one another in times of trouble all the world over. I'll take it all on myself and will account to your mother for the liberty I'm taking when she's well enough to discuss such things. So now I'll be off and will send in a suitable nurse at once. Good-bye—God bless you, my dear."

He roughly pressed her hand and was gone in a moment, leaving her standing looking desolately after him. She shuddered as she thought of him as her possible, nay probable husband, he was so bluff and burly and grizzled, so loud of voice, so red of face, so dominant; he jarred upon every fibre of her being. But it was useless to fight longer against fate, even in the person of a man who was utterly and entirely distasteful to her. She had struggled with all her might against the sacrifice of

her soul's best instincts but to no purpose, the threads were drawing closer and closer around her and if her mother recovered and still demanded the complete sacrifice of herself against which she had so passionately fought, she had given her word and must carry it through to the very end.

Before a couple of hours had gone by a white-capped nurse in dainty uniform had arrived at the little house and had installed herself in charge of the case, and when Mary got home from her work the following afternoon, Mrs. Hamilton had recovered her senses again and was pronounced to be vastly improved.

Her first mumbled words were as a death-knell to Mary's heart—"You—promised," she said, thickly.

"Yes, yes, I have not forgotten," Mary said, hurriedly. "Don't think of that, dear; only get well and I will do anything you like."

The sick woman gave a murmur of satisfaction and closed her eyes again. Mary turned away and went to the window, where she stood looking out trying to keep herself under control. Her face was white and set, her hands shaking and cold. So her mother had not forgotten, the sacrifice would have to be made and she must at no distant time sell herself into a slavery which would be a living horror. And this was the end of all her toil, of all her ambitions, of all her brilliant hopes and vivid dreamings! Small wonder that her heart seemed as if it had turned to water within her, that her soul seemed numb and dead as if she had lost herself in a deep and treacherous morass from which she could never be extricated, try and struggle as she would.

I need not dwell upon this part of Mary Hamilton's story. The hot and dusty summer

days dragged drearily by, each one that slipped into the tale that is fast bringing the inevitable nearer and nearer. Mrs. Hamilton slowly improved in health, Mary went to and fro to her work, the white-capped nurse remained in attendance and Captain Conway hovered around the little household like a good angel, an angel with a red weather-beaten face and with a very large circumference.

The end came all too soon. He spoke to her one evening, told her his hopes and fears; a great many hopes it must be owned, and a very few fears it must be confessed. And Mary told him honestly that she had never thought of him before her mother's illness as a possible husband, told him that she had never thought of marrying him or any one else, thanked him with tears in her grey eyes for his goodness to her mother and promised that if he would not expect too much of her,

she would do her best to be a good and faithful wife to him.

Captain Conway's answer was characteristic of the man. He told her with all the assurance and confidence of an Adonis of twenty years his junior that he was perfectly satisfied with her promises, that he would teach her to love him when once she was really his own. Mary shuddered but allowed the remark to pass in silence and, if the whole truth be told, let an inward prayer escape her heart that some thunderbolt might fall and strike her before that terrible day dawned.

Such prayers, however, are mostly futile. Mary's wedding-day dawned all too soon and the warning "be not afraid with any amazement" rang out over the heads of an ashen-pale bride, who had steadfastly and resolutely refused to allow herself to be decked in bridal attire, a rather nervous and

rubicund bridegroom, who dropped the ring and mumbled his vows defiantly after the officiating minister, a mahogany-faced groomsman and a frail, elderly lady in a mauve silk who leaned upon the arm of a tall young woman in nurse's uniform.

So the sacrifice was completed! To Mary Hamilton, Mary Conway by then, it passed like a hideous dream, only there was no awakening.

"My darling child," cried her mother, enthusiastically. "I am so happy— My dear children."

"I am glad, mother," Mary whispered back and wondered the while if God would ever forgive her for the false vows she had plighted, the outrage she had done to herself, for being the living lie that she was.

And then began a life which was an hourly, daily torture and martyrdom. The husband



was quick to see that he had made the gravest of all mistakes, that he had bought the casket but could not possess himself of the jewel within, to realize that his wife was his, but that her heart was miles and miles away and would never be his, even though he were to live for a thousand years. He was quick to learn that he would never be the master to teach this particular pupil to conjugate the verb to love and the knowledge coming upon his passionate love and admiration for her, was as oil poured upon a fierce flame.

How can I describe those few weeks which passed between the marriage and Captain Conway's first departure on a voyage to the other side of the world? They were hideous! Mary, who had been awakened also, was possessed of only one desire—to hide the truth from the mother for whose sake she had sold herself, to hide from her the knowledge which

had come to her all too surely, that the genial, bluff, jovial sailor, with his frank, hearty ways and his open-handed generosity, was in reality of a coarse and calculating nature, which had taken count of every farthing that he had expended and who looked to have payment and interest for every single coin; to hide from her that his geniality too often meant drink and that his frank bluffness was merely the cover for a vindictive and passionate temper. To hide from her, in short, all that he really and truly was.

It was not until within a few days of the time fixed for the sailing of Captain Conway's ship that there was actually any open disagreement between them and even then the full measure of her humiliation and misery came upon her like a thunderclap. It happened that Captain Conway had been explaining to her how she must manage about money

during his absence. "The rent is paid," he said. "And you can draw ten pounds a week which ought to cover the bare expenses. If you fall short at the end of the month when the wages are due— Are you listening Mary?" he broke off in a voice of thunder.

"Yes, Edward, of course I am listening," said Mary with a violent start.

"Then what do you want to look like that for? Do you want to make me think you're pining because I am going? Bah! You're enough to sicken a man, you white-faced cat."

The girl's first instinct was to start to her feet, her fingers almost without her own will clenched themselves together, her cheeks were as red as peonies until, in her anger at such an insult, they faded to the paleness of death. Then she remembered her mother, the frail, weak, feeble soul who persisted in calling Captain Conway her dear boy, and in attribut-

ing to him every noble and generous attribute that could by any chance be found in the character of any man, and her instinct was to hide it, to smooth things over, to—to go on living the lie as she had begun.

“Edward, don’t say that,” she began, nervously. “You will frighten my mother.”

“And if I do!” he cried, roughly. “It’s always mother here, mother there. What do I care whether she’s frightened or not?”

“You frighten me,” Mary gasped, and in truth she was shaking in every limb, shaking like an aspen leaf in a storm.

“I’m glad of that. It’s a relief to find I can make you feel something. What did you marry me for?”

“You wanted me to marry you,” she said, unsteadily.

“I wanted you! I—I— Yes, and you laid yourself out to please me”—

“My God, no!” she cried, sharply, forgetting for a moment her policy of conciliation. And then—I don’t like to write it—I don’t like to think of it—then there was a blow—a fall—and dead silence only broken by the deep-drawn, gasping sobs of an outraged and broken-hearted woman.

For a moment he said nothing. Then he seemed to pull himself together and he put out his hand to help her. “I didn’t mean to do that,” he said, shamefacedly. “I ought not to have done it. You drew it on yourself, Mary, but I’m sorry. Kiss me and be friends.”

She put his hand aside and rose to her feet without aid; and there they stood facing each other, he flushed and ashamed, she with the mark of his hand upon her face.

“You struck me,” she said, at last. Her whole face and being were changed. From a

passive martyr, she had become an accusing spirit. “*You—struck—me!*” The words hissed out like whips cutting through the air. The man shrank a little as he heard.

“I forgot myself,” he muttered, sullenly. “I admit it. I want to be friends.”

The girl’s grey eyes were fixed upon him and seemed to look into his very soul. “You told me you would teach me to love you,” she said, with intense scorn. “Your way is rough and ready. I congratulate you upon your success.”

“Mary,” he burst out. “You never did care—you’ve cheated me”—

“Care—*I?*” she echoed. “You are strong for a man—I am not even strong for a girl, for all my life has been passed in sitting at a desk. You may kill me if you like. I dare say you will and I shall not mind, for at least, it will take me out of this; but at any rate I

will tell you one thing. I have hated myself for *not* caring. I have never ceased to reproach myself for having loathed you.—Now, with all my heart, I thank God for it.”

## CHAPTER III

### HER LAST WORD

WHEN Mary Conway uttered those scathing words—"I have never ceased to reproach myself for having loathed you.—Now, with all my heart, I thank God for it," they were followed by a long, dead silence. She, slight and frail and ashen-white, stood boldly fronting him, her eyes filled with intensest scorn and showing no shred of the fear with which her heart was quaking,—he, divided between rage and astonishment just touched with shame that he should have raised his hand to a woman and that woman his young wife. So they stood until at last he found words with which to speak.

"So you loathe me, do you?"

An older or a wiser woman might have



given a softer answer than leaped to Mary Conway's lips in reply. "Yes," she said, harshly. "Only loathing is too mild a word."

"But you married me—you were willing enough to marry me," he said, gnawing at his under lip viciously.

"Willing—*never!*" she flashed out. "I married you, it is true, with feelings of gratitude, with a desire to do my best to repay you for the money you had laid out, with a belief that you were kind and good, if not the lover of my heart nor the husband of my imagination. I have learned since that there was no need of gratitude from me to you, that there was no kindness or goodness in the help you gave during my mother's illness, that every day the nurse remained, every drop of wine my mother drank, every strawberry she ate were all entered into an account which I was

to pay one day with my very heart's blood.— Well, you have had your pound of flesh, you have bought your wife, and the bargain is complete, the debt all paid. To-day you have broken every bond, every link, every chain between us. I bear your name, that's all."

"Is that your last word, Mary?"

"Yes—my last word. No, I am not afraid of you. My poor little frail body is afraid, horribly, desperately afraid of you—but my heart and my soul and all that's best of me—never—never—never."

"You'll be glad when I'm gone?"

"Thankful."

"You'll never remember anything of what I did for you?"

"I shall always remember you as the man *who struck me.*"

"You'd like to be free of me?"

She drew a deep breath more significant

than words. He laughed aloud, a laugh void of merriment, such as one might hear from the friends in hell.

“You’d like me to provide for you perhaps? To make you a suitable allowance and clear out myself, eh? To leave you and your old mother”—

“Leave my mother out of it,” she cried, fiercely.

“Oh, I’ve no wish to say anything against her,” he retorted. “To do her full justice, she’s always been appreciative enough of me, a thundering deal more so than you have. Still she’s there. She’s got to be reckoned with, to be provided for, and you’d like to see her end her days in comfort.”

“I was satisfied enough with my life before you came and made her dissatisfied with the provision that I was able to make for her. You took away my living—it is but right that

you should provide for both. You did nothing with your eyes shut.”

“Nor you. Well—I do provide for you both—I shall continue to do so. But there’s a side to my part of the bargain. I didn’t look to provide for a wife, to say nothing of her mother, and to keep away from her, and I won’t do it. You’ve no witness that I struck you—and it wouldn’t sound a likely story anyhow. I’ll go away to-day instead of Monday, for I’m sore and angry and not master of myself and neither are you. But I shall come back again. I shall come home again and you’ll receive me as if nothing had happened between us. I’m sorry I forgot myself just now and for that reason, I’ll give you till I come home again to pull yourself together in and after that, we will begin again as if nothing had happened.”

“I shall never begin again as if nothing had

happened," she exclaimed, passionately. "How could I? You struck me. So long as you were only old and rough and—and—distasteful to me, I endured you. But you have gone beyond"—

"You took me for better or worse," he interrupted.

"I know it; but I did not bargain for its being all for worse."

"We'll see about that," he said with a sneer. "It's easy work talking of what one will or one won't do. You've left yourself in a cleft stick, my fine little lady wife, and I think when you come to facing the world from the very bottom of the ladder, with your invalid mother who has got used to a comfortable way of living, you'll find it harder than you think for. It's one thing to talk large about breaking loose and it's another thing to do it with your handicap tied round your neck. Any

way, that's *my* last word. I've made up my mind. It's a case of my will giving way to yours, or yours breaking down to mine. I don't intend if there's any breaking down that it shall be on my side."

He did not give her time to reply but went out of the room with a great bustle and the next moment she heard him giving directions to the servants about his baggage. A few minutes afterward she heard him go out of the house, and then came the sound of her mother's voice calling to her.

"Mary, Mary, where are you?"

"Here, mother. Do you want anything?"

She ran down into the bright little entrance-hall to find her mother, who still dragged one leg a little, holding on to the door-post of the drawing-room.

"My poor child, my poor darling child, what terrible news," she exclaimed. She was

smartly and daintily dressed and looked very pretty as she stood there.

“What terrible news?” asked Mary. For a moment her heart stood still, for she thought that her husband had blurted out all the truth in his anger.

“What news?” echoed Mrs. Hamilton. “Why, that dear Edward has had a telegram which will take him away from us to-day instead of next week. Try to bear up, my poor darling.”

“Yes, I will try, mother,” said Mary, feeling almost ready to let herself go off into wild shrieks of hysterical laughter at the irony of the situation.

“In the first flush of your married happiness, too,” Mrs. Hamilton said, mournfully, as she dragged slowly back again to her seat by the window. “Of course duty is duty, as I said to the dear fellow.”

“And what did he say to that?” Mary asked the question involuntarily.

“Oh, he is always so full of his quaint, bluff humor,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, smiling tenderly at the recollection. “‘It’s no use keeping a mill to turn, mother,’ he said in his hearty way—‘unless one finds grist to put in it.’ Dear fellow.”

Mary sat down at the other side of the window and got out her embroidery from the smart workbasket. Mrs. Hamilton looked at her with astonished eyes, first at her and then at the bit of dainty work in her hands.

“Are you not going to help Mouncey?” she asked. It was a point of honor with Mrs. Hamilton that Mary’s maids should be called by their surnames, although both of them detested the custom.

“No, mother—Mouncey has all instructions from Edward.”



For a moment Mrs. Hamilton kept silence, but at last she burst out impulsively. "You are very strange, Mary," she cried. "When your poor father was going away, I always arranged every little detail for him with my own hands—but you sit there as coldly as if you had been married twenty years instead of this being your first parting with your husband, little more than a bridegroom."

It must be owned that the girl felt a thrill of disgust go through her at her mother's words. A wild prayer half formed itself in her heart that this first parting might be the last and an alluring picture of a quiet grave with the inscription "Mary Conway, aged 23" on the headstone, slipped sweetly through her mind. She even smiled, heart-sick as she was, as she answered her mother's plaintive and wondering words.

"Ah, but you see it was different with you,

mother, you married for love. Edward doesn't keep me to pack his things for him. Mouncey will do it better than I."

"It is most strange," said Mrs. Hamilton, "but, of course, we express our feelings so differently. You are so like your poor father, and not in the least like me. He was always so quiet and reserved—just as you are."

"One cannot help one's nature," said Mary, trying to speak with indifference. "And, of course, we have known all along that Edward would have to be away a good deal; a few days more or less makes little difference."

"Ah! well, it is all for the best that you do take things like that," said Mrs. Hamilton, distinct reproach in her tones. "I should never have done for a sailor's wife—I should have broken my heart every time he went away."

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," said Mary.

She felt that the remark was flippant, even unfeeling, and yet the effort which she was putting upon herself was so great that it was only by the most severe determination that she was able to keep herself calm. The thrill of compunction was, however, thrown away, for Mrs. Hamilton's shallow mind was not capable of taking in two ideas at the same time.

"Ah, yes, truer words were never spoken," she remarked. "I often wonder what I should have done if Providence had not sent dear Edward our way. I shudder to think what my life would have been, ill and alone all day, in that miserable little house, in that dreary, sordid neighborhood."

"I should have made other arrangements. I should have done my best," said Mary, a little indignantly.

"Yes, darling child, I know you would,"

Mrs. Hamilton returned, in an indulgent tone, as one might speak to a feeble person who had tried to stem the river of life and had failed utterly. "But mercifully—and truly the ways of Providence are wonderful, I feel it more and more every day that I live—mercifully God did think fit to temper the wind to the shorn lamb—or the shorn sheep as one might say in my case. Mary, what have you done to your face?" She asked the last question in a totally different voice—Mrs. Hamilton was always two people at one and the same time, the artificial fine lady who was given to preaching little sermonettes all in platitudes, and the shallow, self-centred person with a keen eye to the main chance of number one.

Mary started at the direct question. She was accustomed to hearing her mother babble aimlessly on from subject to subject, but a

change of tone always called for attention. "My face," she said, slowly, putting up her hand to the red mark—"oh—it got knocked."

For half a word she would have burst out with the whole story, but in her sudden upward glance she had noted Mrs. Hamilton's serene, well-satisfied expression, the look of care and attention which pervaded her whole person, her smart gown, her dainty little coquettish cap. All these things meant money, all these little details were as the breath of life to the shallow and narrow soul who had never before known what it was to revel in a fairly good income. As the conviction came home to her, Mary's heart failed or her better nature prevailed, so that she kept the truth to herself.

"—it got knocked," she said, evasively, and Mrs. Hamilton was satisfied. She went into a long dissertation of how she once had run against a closet door in the dark and of

how "your poor father" said that her face looked exactly as if some one had struck her; and in the midst of this Mary suddenly remembered something that would carry her upstairs, and once in the shelter of her own room, she fought with her pain and misery, ay, as desperately as any martyr fought with beasts of old in the amphitheatre of cruel Rome.

It was hard work, hard work, this martyrdom of hers, a voluntary sacrifice for a mother incapable of appreciating a nature finer than her own; it was nobility thrown away, consideration for one who never considered any one but herself. Some glimmering—and it was only a glimmering, for our knowledge of natures with which we have grown up, comes but slowly and tremblingly—came to her when she had calmed herself and forced herself to go down again to the pretty drawing-room which was part of her prison.

“Frozen, poor darling,” she heard her mother say—“quite frozen. Be very tender with her, dear boy, she has a highly sensitive nature and feels things terribly. Those who can sob and cry, get off very easily in this life, my dear Edward—but it is the quiet, undemonstrative ones who *feel*. My poor darling, my heart aches for her.”

## CHAPTER IV

### PARTED

THE actual parting between Captain Conway and Mary was got over more easily than she had hoped. She had been afraid that Mrs. Hamilton would be present to the last moment and that she would inevitably discover at least something of the true state of affairs between them. Fortunately, however, Mrs. Hamilton was dominated by a keen desire to spare herself any needless excitement, so that she ensconced herself in her favorite chair in the drawing-room window and bade farewell to her son-in-law in that place.

“Go to the gate to see the last of the master,” she said to the two servants. “Mrs. Conway is feeling the parting terribly and it



will be less hard for her if she has no one to look on."

The two girls were not a little sceptical as to the depth of their young mistress' woe, but they fell in with cheerful obedience to the wishes of "Missis's mother" and went off to the front gate leaving the husband and wife to part without on-lookers.

What actually took place was this. Captain Conway went in to the drawing-room to say good-bye to Mrs. Hamilton, enduring her tears and clinging embraces like a true Briton. "I'll take care of her, dear boy," she whispered, brokenly. "My poor, poor child."

"Good-bye, mother," he said, briefly. "I haven't a minute to spare. Good-bye. Take care of yourself," and then he went out of the room closing the door behind him.

"Well, good-bye, Mary," he said, holding out his hand to his wife.

“Good-bye,” said Mary, without looking at him.

“You haven’t changed your mind yet?” he asked.

“Not in the least.”

For a moment he said nothing. “You little devil,” he hissed at last between his teeth—“you’re prettier and more fetching than ever.” He caught hold of her and held her closely to him. “Do you think you are going to keep me at arm’s length forever? Not a bit of it. I love you ten thousand times more for being such a little devil as you are. All the other women I’ve ever known are as tame as new milk compared to you. There’s no mistake about your being like strong drink to a man. You’ll kiss me before I go?”

“Not I!”

“No! Well, I’ll wait for that. Meantime you’re here, my lady-bird, and I’ll have a

few kisses to remember you by before we part."

"No—no."

"Yes—yes," he persisted, and being like a frail reed in the hands of a giant, she could not prevent him from covering her face with kisses.

He set her free as suddenly as he had caught her and turning went out of the house and away down the garden-path without once again looking at her. Mary, as soon as she was free, fled to her own room and locked herself into that sanctuary. Her first act was to run to the dressing-glass and to look at herself, and somehow the sight of her scarlet face and blazing eyes but served to fan the fierce flame of bitter resentment which was burning so passionately in her heart. "How dared he, how dared he?" she burst out. "Does he think I am a toy to be flung down one minute

and played with the next? Oh, how dared he?"

She was quivering with rage but there was no suspicion of tears about her eyes; outraged pride, anger, womanly fury possessed her, but grief had no place in that tumult of emotions. She felt more deeply insulted than if some strange man had seized her in the street and had deliberately kissed her without so much as a with your leave or a by your leave. Such a proceeding her thoughts might have put down to a dozen motives, admiration, daring, or a wager; but to think that the man who only that morning had raised his hand and struck her to the floor, to think that he had dared to force his loathsome kisses upon her and in sight of her absolute refusal, it was horrible—it was an outrage, no more, no less.

She was still raging when the bell rang in

the hall and after a minute or so Mouncey came up and told her that tea was served in the drawing-room. With the best intentions in the world, and believing thoroughly in a cup of tea as a universal panacea for every woe, Mrs. Hamilton had ordered the small repast to be served a full half-hour earlier than usual, and when Mary, still flushed and full of ire, came down, she entered into a voluble explanation of her reasons for so doing.

“Come, my darling, a cup of tea will do you all the good in the world. I suggested to Mouncey that she should let us have it at once. There are little hot buns, dear child.—Come, try to eat some, for fretting will not bring our dear boy home one day earlier.”

A reply rose to the tip of Mary's tongue, one which would have relieved her mother's mind forever as to the likelihood of her fret-

ting; she choked it back, however, and sat down before the tea-table. Mrs. Hamilton looked at her furtively.

“Evidently she is bottling it all up, poor darling; there’s not a sign of a tear. Such an intense yet reserved nature. My poor, poor girl!” and then Mrs. Hamilton helped herself to a little hot bun with a virtuous air as one who is conscious of having done her whole duty in every relation of life.

From that moment the household went on with the regularity of clockwork and in all respects as if no absent master was in existence. Mrs. Hamilton assiduously studied the daily papers for news of the *Arikhama*, and she babbled from time to time of “our dear boy.” After several days she, however, gave up even that much and as Mary did not divulge the contents of several letters which she received from her husband, Mrs. Hamilton

was positively afraid to question her on the subject but contented herself with seeing that extra good things were provided for Mary's meals.

“Yes—see that there are little buns, Mouncey,” she said each morning. “And tell Foster to make them very hot and with plenty of butter. What would Mrs. Conway like for a sweet?—Well, let me see, she used to love a trifle with almonds, ratafias and strawberry jam. You might tell Foster to make a nice little dish of trifle and perhaps mushrooms on toast for afterward. We must take care to keep Mrs. Conway's strength up. She is feeling the parting terribly.”

“Which”—commented Julia Mouncey as she repeated the conversation to the neat cook in the kitchen—“which between you and me, Alice, I'm more than doubtful about. It's my opinion that missis married master out of con-

sideration for her ma. 'Tain't likely a grizzled, gruff, unreasonable beast such as 'im's going to break any young girl's 'eart when he goes away."

"I shouldn't wonder but what you're right, Julia," returned Foster, wisely.

Meantime in Mary's mind only a huge sense of relief from an obnoxious presence dominated every other feeling. She heard her mother's remarks about "our dear boy" it is true, but she simply endured them as so much babble which it would be useless to answer. Her one idea was to think out some plan by which she could be rendered free of her husband's purse at the end of the time of his absence. She had fully made up her mind that she would never under any circumstances live with him again. She told herself that it was no part of a wife's duties to live with a man who had used personal violence toward her; she went over the



situation many times in her own mind, and she had deliberately come to the conclusion that in striking her to the ground, Captain Conway had forfeited all further right to her consideration.

“I knew,” her thoughts ran, “that he was elderly, or at least of advanced middle age, that he was rough and plain in ways and manners, but I did *not* know that he was a brute, an unmitigated brute. If I had known it, even for my mother’s sake I could not and would not have married him. Now I feel I am perfectly justified in carving out the rest of my own life independently of him.”

But though it is an easy thing to say that one will carve out a life for oneself, it is another thing to do it. It is one thing to declare for independence; it is another thing to free oneself from a dependent position. And when Mary Conway came to weigh herself in the

balance against fate, she found that she was not able to press down her side of the scales so much as a jot.

Her own career in which she had been doing so well at the time of her marriage was irrevocably closed to her, even had she been willing to begin again at the lowest rung of the ladder, and no other one seemed to be open to her. She thought of many ways of earning a living, but the very first question which common sense put to her always brought her up sharp like a bird tied by the leg which, when it would flutter away, is brought up sharply to a standstill by the string that ties it. The question was "What do you know about it?" the answer was always the same and replied with uncompromising curtness—"Nothing!"

She gave more than a thought to going on the stage—always a woman's first instinct in

times of stress; but when she heard of there being eleven hundred names on the books of one theatre and fifteen hundred on the promise-list of another, she was discouraged from any hopes of success in that direction. She thought of trying literature and she did write a little story which she smiled and cried over and copied out many times and loved dearly. But she sent her bantling out into the hard world and she never saw or heard of it again! She wondered whether she could start a better-class school for small children—but again, although she felt herself competent enough to teach, common sense stepped in and asked “How are you going to furnish a house, how are you going to live during the first quarter? Will your mother ever consent to tear herself away from ‘her dear boy’ and Acacia Villa?” And the answer to each was such as showed the utter hopelessness of attempting any such scheme

as a way out of her present difficulties. The want of experience, the want of capital, the drag that her invalid mother must always be upon her movements, these disadvantages always came home to her when she thought out some fresh scheme for earning a living.

“If I had only myself to consider, I could go and be a scullery-maid,” she said to herself passionately, forgetting, poor girl, that a school-teacher would be of but little use in kitchen or scullery.

So the days went by, peacefully and uneventfully enough, in perfect content on Mrs. Hamilton's part, in feverish unrest for Mary. And as each one darkened into night, she felt that she was one day nearer to a terrible alternative, to a meeting with the man who had sworn to protect her against all possible troubles, but who had outraged her womanhood, and broke down every shred of respect

and gratitude which she might, nay would have felt for him. She felt more and more as each morning rose that she was fast approaching the time when she must either submit to the vilest degradation of herself or see her mother thrust out in her feebleness to face a cold world in which there was not so much as the barest provision for her! It was a terrible situation, a cruel alternative, yet it was the natural outcome of a marriage entered into without the one great amalgamating alloy—love!

But time goes on. Be the need ever so great, there are no Joshuas nowadays to bid the sun stand still in the heavens and so time flits on with noiseless and relentless step. The summer faded, autumn drew on, winter was nigh at hand and Mary Conway had found no resting-place, no coign of vantage, no protection against the humiliation that loomed before her.

Her last effort was to go round the great dress-shops in the West End but each one found some fault and would have none of her. One told her that want of experience was an insuperable objection, another that they never took young ladies into the show-rooms without a handsome premium. A third complained that she was not tall enough, a fourth that she looked delicate, a fifth that she was too shy in manner. So she went home wearied in mind and body alike with one more avenue closed to her, one more hope gone. And when she with a word of explanation upon her lips, opened the drawing-room door, it was to find her mother lying senseless upon the ground, and in her stiffened fingers an evening paper tightly clutched.

## CHAPTER V

### SHIPWRECK

MARY CONWAY forgot in an instant all the weariness and heartsickness which had possessed her when she entered the house. She cast but one glance at the helpless figure lying on the hearth-rug, then ran to the bell and pulled at it hard, an eager peal such as brought the two maidservants running in to see what was amiss.

“Mouncey—my mother! How long has she been left?” Mrs. Conway gasped.

Mouncey with a scared face knelt down on the other side of the unconscious woman. “Lor, ma’am,” she said, in trembling tones, “it’s not ten minutes since I carried tea in. I

came twice and Mrs. Hamilton said she'd rather wait for you and at last Foster made the buns hot and I brought tea in without saying anything. And Mrs. Hamilton she says, 'Why, Mouncey,' she says, 'you do spoil me.' And I says to her, 'Lor, ma'am, misses will be vexed, if you go any longer past your tea-time.' And then she says, 'There's the newsboy. I'd like a paper, Mouncey.' So I went out and got one and I give it to her and—why, poor lady, she's never had any tea at all."

"We must get her up to bed at once," said Mary, anxiously. "Can we carry her among us?"

"Lor, yes, ma'am," answered Mouncey, promptly—"a little bit of a thing like her. Here, Foster, take her feet—I'll take her head. No, ma'am, we can do better just the two of us."



. She was right and Mrs. Hamilton, who was very small and slight, was soon safely laid upon her own bed.

“I’d better fetch the doctor, ma’am?” asked Foster.

“Oh, yes, yes, at once. We must get her into bed, Mouncey.”

“Yes, ma’am, but there’s no need to hurry. Poor lady, I’m afraid it will make very little difference to her.”

“Hush—sh!” cried Mary, fearfully.

“Nay, ma’am, she hears nothing. If I was you I would just cover her over with the eider-quilt till the doctor has seen her. Anyway I wouldn’t undress her till the fire has burned up. I was just coming up to light it.”

She covered the old lady with the warm, gay-colored quilt as she spoke and taking, after the manner of housemaids, a box of matches from her pocket set light to the fire, which

soon burned up cheerfully, casting a bright glow over the pretty room.

“I’ll fetch you a cup of tea now, ma’am,” she remarked, “for I’m sure you need it.”

The protest which instinctively rose to her lips, died away under a newborn realization of her intense weariness. “I am very, very tired, Mouncey,” she said, helplessly.

The good-natured girl drew her into a chair by the fire. “Sit here, ma’am, until I bring your tea. You can’t do anything for the poor lady and you may want all your strength for later on.”

She sped away, returning in a very short time with the tea-tray on which was a pot of fresh tea and a covered plate of hot buns which had been on the stove awaiting the mistress’s return. This she arranged on a little table by the fireside, then poured out the tea

and held the inviting little cakes that Mary might take one.

In truth Mary was too tired to refuse such ministrations which were doubly welcome just then, and Mouncey fairly stood over her until she had eaten enough to satisfy her sense of what was necessary and right. Then she went downstairs leaving her mistress sitting in the big armchair wondering what the end of it all would be.

“Poor mother,” her thoughts ran—“poor, poor mother. Are you going this time and have I made the sacrifice for nothing? No, not for nothing, for I shall always be able to say ‘The end of her life was peace.’”

She rose restlessly from her chair and went to the side of the bed, where she stood looking down upon the drawn, grey face already so deathlike in the immobility of unconsciousness. “I wonder what caused her to have an

attack?" Mary said to herself. "She was so bright and well this morning. Could there have been anything in that paper? Where is it? What did Mouncey do with it?"

She looked about for it but without success, and then she remembered that possibly it was still in her mother's hand. So it proved to be and Mary was obliged to tear the sheet a little in order to release it from that vice-like grip.

A glance was sufficient to tell the cause of Mrs. Hamilton's seizure. As she smoothed the crumpled page, her eye caught the heading of the latest telegraphic news—"Reported loss of the Ocean Liner, *Arikhama*, with over three hundred lives."

Mary Conway was still staring wildly at the paper when Mouncey came in with the doctor in her wake. "What is it?" she asked, seeing the horror on her young mistress's face.

“Oh, Mouncey—the paper—the news—my poor mother,” was all that Mary could say ere exhausted nature gave way under the strain and she dropped to the ground as dead to all sound and feeling as the poor lady stretched upon the bed.

“Dear, dear, dear,” said the doctor, “but this is a pretty kettle of fish. Dear, dear, a bad seizure this time. I was afraid it might happen before long. My good girl, is there bad news in that paper?”

“Lor, sir—master’s ship—loss of the *Ari-khama* with three hundred souls. That’s master’s ship—he’s the captain. Oh, my poor missis, my poor, poor missis!”

“Good heavens—are you sure?”

“See here, sir—oh, it’s true enough. Oh, my poor, poor missis.”

“Well, help me to get her off the floor—in her case it’s no more than a simple faint.

Yes, in that chair—undo her gown—a few drops of brandy. There, there, my dear lady, you'll be all right now."

"What has happened?" asked Mary, struggling up but sinking back again as her head began to swim—"Oh, I remember. It doesn't matter about me, doctor, but my mother—she is very ill. The shock was too much for her. Do attend to her, please."

"If you will lie still, the maid and I will attend to Mrs. Hamilton," said the doctor, soothingly. "Little or nothing to be done," he murmured to Mouncey, as they turned to the bed. "She is not likely to live the night out. She must be got into bed, of course. What strength have you?"

"Oh, I'm very strong, sir," replied Mouncey, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"No, no, I meant how many of you are there?"

“Me and cook, sir.”

“What is she like?”

“As strong and sensible a young woman as you could wish to see in a day’s march, sir,” replied Mouncey, promptly. “And’ll do anything in the world for the missis.”

“That’s good. If Mrs. Hamilton lingers there must be a nurse got in, of course; but for to-night there will be little or nothing to do, only she must not be left. I’ll help you to get her into bed.”

“We can manage, sir.”

“It is not so easy as you think. Besides I’d like to see her safely into bed before I leave.”

The desired end was soon accomplished, under the skilled hands of the doctor and the willing ones of Mouncey. Then the doctor wrote down a few simple instructions and left, promising to look in again the last thing.

“Mrs. Conway,” he said, gently, to Mary,

“I must beg of you to try to eat your dinner. You have had a great double-shock and you will need all your reserve of strength. I have given your maid all instructions—there is little, almost nothing to be done while your mother continues in this state.”

He went away then and Mary sat down again in the big chair. The cook was busy with the dinner and Mouncey, after clearing up some imaginary litter, disappeared with the tray, promising to come back in a few minutes. So she was left alone with her dying mother and the knowledge of her own widowhood, left alone to face the fact that she was practically free, that all the horror and wretchedness which had but a few hours before lain directly facing her, had suddenly been removed. The tears gushed out from her sad eyes as she realized *how* this had come about, but although she wept, the sense of re-



lief was there, involuntary, yet very, very strong.

It was a wretched night which followed. Mary honestly tried to eat the dainty little dinner which Foster served to her while Mouncey mounted guard in the sick-chamber, but all the time the sound of rushing waters was in her ears and the vision of drowned faces before her eyes, and she turned loathingly from the lonely meal which would have been thoroughly enjoyed by the the poor soul upstairs fast drifting into eternity.

The pretense of dinner over she crept back again to the sick-room, sending the two maids down to supper and staying alone to keep the watch by the dying beloved for whom she had worked so hard and suffered so much, to watch the outward passage of that frail and feeble little bark which would leave her tossing to

and fro upon the ocean of life with none to counsel or guide.

It was a terrible night and it was followed by a still more terrible day. Mary received from the owners of the great ship full confirmation of the news which the newspaper had taken to them in the first instance.

There was not the smallest doubt that the large vessel was gone, that she was many fathoms under water. There was little or no doubt that Captain Conway had gone down with her and so far as was known only five persons of all her goodly company had lived to tell the tale of her disastrous end. Two of these were passengers, two were ordinary sailors, the fifth was the ship's purser; all the rest of the three hundred souls who had sailed aboard of her had found a watery grave and would be seen no more.

All through the long hours of watching and

suspense did Mary Conway try to battle down the overwhelming sense of relief which had taken possession of her. She cared not, did not feel the very smallest grief for the husband who had forgotten his manhood and her womanhood alike, but she hated herself for not feeling it. Her heart was torn in twain—one half was singing a pæan of thankfulness for deliverance, the other was bursting with a sense of her own impotence and helplessness to avert the sword then hanging above the head of her sick mother as the sword of Damocles hung suspended by a single hair.

She was glad in her heart that her care and anxiety for her mother would naturally account for the absence of any exhibition of great or noisy grief for her husband. The doctor spoke of the loss of the *Arikhama* once or twice, and Mouncey brought her the latest details that were published in the papers, but

Mrs. Hamilton was during those first few days the object of paramount interest. Captain Conway was gone! All the love or loathing in the world could not affect him any more, for him all was over, he had already passed among the things that have been and shall be no more. But Mrs. Hamilton was still alive, still needed the most minute care and the closest attention. She was in spite of that terrible tragedy of the sea, the most important person of that small household.

In health she did not improve. At times faint flashes of understanding came back but they were only feeble and flickering efforts of the clouded brain to reëstablish its mastery of what was going on around her. If she knew any one definitely it was Mary, but of that, even, they were none of them very certain. The nurse who was in charge said positively that Mrs. Hamilton knew no one. Mouncey

on the other hand insisted that she had seen the poor lady's eyes follow the mistress as she moved away from the bed. This, however, was a question which no one could decide positively but in discussing it, the on-lookers, although it is proverbial that on-lookers see most of the game, never realized that in anxiety for her mother, Mrs. Conway suffered no grief for her husband.

On the fourth day after the coming of the news, Mary received a visit from two gentlemen. One was the managing-director of the company to which the *Arikhama* had belonged, the other was by him introduced as the lawyer to the company.

"You are perhaps," said Mr. Lawson, the managing-director, "not aware, Mrs. Conway, that your husband made a will three days before the *Arikhama* sailed from London."

"I did not know it," said Mary.

“Such, however, was the case,” he said, suavely, “and, moreover, his last instructions were that should anything happen during either of these voyages, Mr. Mannington”—indicating his companion by a gesture—“should at once seek you out and make you acquainted with as little delay as possible with his last wishes with regard to the property he had to leave.”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HAND OF THE DEAD

MR. LAWSON ceased speaking and fixed his attention upon his companion. Mary also turned her clear eyes upon the lawyer and awaited what he might say next. To say the least of it his remark was unexpected. "I may say at once that I did not make this will of Captain Conway's," he said, in polite and strictly professional accents. "It was made by some person unknown to me and handed to me by Captain Conway sealed as you see it with instructions that should necessity arise I should at once seek you out, break the seals in your presence and make you acquainted with the contents."

"I am quite at your service," said Mary, tremulously.

The lawyer at once broke the seals and drew from the long, tough envelope a folded paper. Mary sat with hands quietly clasped in her lap waiting. Mr. Mannington cast his eye over the writing, frowned, bit his lip, glanced at the girl-widow apprehensively and then coughed nervously.

“You have no idea—I should say—I mean”—he stammered.

Mary looked up. “Will you read it?” she suggested. “I have no idea what is in it but I shall be surprised at nothing. Captain Conway had strange ideas on some subjects.”

“Very strange,” murmured Mr. Lawson, who gathered from the lawyer’s manner that the will contained nothing of pleasant import to the lady.

“I will read it,” said the lawyer—then coughed again and began. “I, Edward Conway, Captain of the S. S. *Arikhama*, being of



sound mind on this the eleventh day of July 18— declare this to be my last will and testament. All and any property of which I die possessed, I give and bequeath to my nephew, Howard Conway, to be absolutely and entirely at his own disposal

(Signed) “EDWARD CONWAY.

“In the presence of

“Henry Challerton,

“John Walker.”

For a few moments the widow and the shipowner were too much surprised to speak. Of the three Mary was the most composed—Mr. Lawson was, however, the first to break the silence.

“You were perhaps otherwise provided for, Mrs. Conway?” he said, gently.

Mary shook her head. “No, I am entirely unprovided for,” she replied.

“But—but such a will is preposterous. Mannington, is there no possibility of upsetting it?”

“Wills have been upset, of course, and will be again,” said the lawyer, guardedly. “In this case, however, such a course would be costly—and uncertain. Mrs. Conway was living with her husband up to the time of his leaving home, she is living under his roof now—it would be difficult to prove that the nephew had possessed or exercised any undue influence or that the testator was not of sound mind at the time of making the will. You for instance could not come forward to throw any doubts upon his sanity from your own observation, for the jury and the public would alike ask what were you about to send out a vessel like the *Arikhama* in charge of a person whom you believed to be more or less of a lunatic.”

“You could not say it,” put in Mary, rising to her feet. “Nor should I wish it. Gentlemen, you need not trouble about me—I dare say Mr. Howard Conway will not turn me out of this house while my mother is so ill—or until she is gone where there is no need of any refuge.”

“I will communicate with him at once,” said Mr. Mannington. “It is not at all likely, especially as he inherits everything—which must be a great and unexpected thing for him,” he added.

“Then I need not detain you any longer,” said Mary, holding out her hand.

Mr. Lawson possessed himself of it. “Forgive me, my dear young lady,” he said, kindly, “but have you means for the moment? If you have illness in the house and you spoke of your mother”—

“My mother is very ill, very, very ill,” said

Mary. "She was an invalid when I married, but the news of Captain Conway's death came upon her without warning and brought on another stroke, a very serious one. We have not much hope of her."

Her voice dropped away to what was little more than a whisper. Mr. Lawson kept hold of her hand and murmured consoling little phrases; Mary, however, was quite dry-eyed, her grief and despair were too deep for ordinary ways of sorrow. "You must let me see you through this," he said at last. "Your husband was in the service of my company for many years and you must not hesitate to take from me what is necessary to tide you over this unlooked-for time. Have you formed any idea or plans yet? But no—of course you have not. Who was to expect that such a will would be left behind?"

Mary looked up at him with her wonderful

clear eyes. "I earned my living for years before I was married," she said, simply. "And I shall be able to earn it again. Just now, of course, I am all out of reckoning and can set about nothing. You are very kind, Mr. Lawson—but I have some money left."

"I will supplement it," he said, hurriedly, and tore himself away unable longer to bear the dumb pain of her eyes and mouth.

At last she was left alone, alone to think over the end to which her fine marriage had brought her, to think that here she was in a house which she had thought her own, but which had been left away from her to one whom her husband had always professed to hate fiercely, penniless except for the few pounds which she happened to have drawn out of the bank before the news of the foundering of the *Arikhama* had reached them.

Well, she had wished, longed, prayed to be free, and her wishes, longings and prayers had been heard and answered. She was free, she was a white slave no longer, she would never again realize with a thrill of shuddering horror that she had sold herself into bondage, into the worst and most hateful kind of bondage, that she had sold not only herself, her body, but to all intents and purposes her very soul. Well, it was all over now. She was herself again, accountable to no one for her actions, she was free of that unbearable chain, of that hated union. The worldly dross for which she had sacrificed herself had fallen away like the links of the chain of fate and she would have to begin at the lowest rung of the ladder again.

Still she would be content. Every crust of bread that she earned would be her own, and sweet would be the taste thereof—it would be

better, far better to sweep a crossing and to live contentedly on the pence earned by sweeping it well, than to live in luxury earned by the loss of all her womanly self-respect. There came to her mind more times than once a verse out of the Great Book—"Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

How true, how true, and yet the poor soul above struggling with the rapids of life and death had never seen the beauty of the dinner of herbs, she had longed to be as the stalled ox, believing that the smoothest pathways must always be the most pleasant and the best for us. Well, she had enjoyed her brief spell of the stalled ox to the full and it was probable that she would slip away over the great barrier without ever knowing that there had been hatred at all. And if that should be so, Mary Conway felt that she would be able to

face all the rest of her life fearlessly and with a thankful spirit.

Late in the evening a messenger arrived bringing a letter by hand from Mr. Lawson. It read :

“DEAR MRS. CONWAY. I do not ask, I do not seek to know the reason that your husband left so strange and almost inhuman a will behind him ; it is enough for me that you are a woman, alone, young and in trouble. Will you accept the enclosed as a gift from one who knew your husband for many years and who liked and respected him ? I beg you to accept it as kindly as it is offered to you.

“Sincerely yours,

“HENRY LAWSON.”

Enclosed with this letter was a check for a hundred pounds.

It would be hard to describe Mary's feelings that night. The kindness, the distant dignity of the few words impressed her deeply. She



never thought of refusing the kindly gift, so welcome to save her from unheard-of horrors, she only longed fiercely and passionately that she might, nay could, would go and tell this man everything, tell him the whole story of her marriage and the cause pure and simple why Captain Conway had left a cruel and wholly unjust will behind him, a sinister blow to strike her in a vulnerable part, and from which she had no chance of defending herself.

She went to her bed that night with a fixed intention of going in the morning to seek out Mr. Lawson and to tell him everything, with a determination that she would justify herself in his eyes.

But morning brought different feelings; in the early dawn a change for the worse came over Mrs. Hamilton and the nurse called Mary from her bed believing that the end was nigh at hand. And as she stood by the side of that

poor, flickering, feeble light so soon to burn out into nothingness so far as concerned this world, a voice came to her telling her to do nothing, to say nothing, the voice of a strange, curious, wise instinct which said—"You are free—don't fetter your freedom by troubling about the past. With good intentions you did what you thought and believed was for the best. The sacrifice was made, served its purpose and you are released. Do nothing. Accept the kindness of this stranger, take it as it is offered, endure all in silence. At the very worst his suspicion, if he has one, is only a suspicion. No good can come to you by blackening the memory of a dead man. If you speak you will but save your fair fame at the expense of his. If he has been ungenerous to you, so spiteful as to aim a blow at you from his sailor's grave, do not retaliate by striking back at him now. Best, far best to suffer in silence; wisest,

far wisest to cut yourself off as completely as may be from the mistaken past, to begin life afresh on your own lines and as free as is possible from the influences which have dominated you, hurt you, and poisoned your better self heretofore.

Mary Conway knew that her instinct was a wise one, that the strange mysterious voice was that of a friend in the best sense of the word. She made up her mind during those few terrible hours of watching that she would follow the advice which had come to her from her inner self, that she would bury the past and begin a new life with the day that she turned her back upon the home of her brief married life, the house which had been in no sense a home to her.

And the following day Henry Lawson received this note :

“I thank you with all my heart for your

kind and generous gift. It will be my salvation and will enable me to start myself afresh. I am quite alone in the world now. My mother died at five o'clock this afternoon.

“Yours, with deep gratitude,

“MARY CONWAY.”

## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE ON NEW LINES

As soon as she could be quietly and decently laid away Mrs. Hamilton was carried out of the pretty villa in which she had enjoyed her brief spell of prosperity, and then Mary made her preparations for turning her back upon her old life forever.

She was not obliged to leave the house with undue haste, for Howard Conway wrote to her as soon as he heard the news of his inheritance, telling her that the house was quite at her disposal for a few weeks, until indeed she had time to make her arrangements. Mary, however, replied that if Mr. Conway would send some one to take possession at eleven o'clock on the following Monday morning she

would be ready and that she would prefer to give up possession, as she would be leaving the house then.

Greatly to her relief Howard Conway did not think it necessary to appear himself but sent a young solicitor who treated the outgoing widow with a curious mixture of condolence and admiration such as would have made a woman who knew the world better, exceedingly angry. Upon Mary, however, this manner had no effect. She had just passed through the great tragedy of her life, she was face to face with a great question "how to live in the future" and a flippant young man with rather bad manners had no more effect upon her than she might have felt from a gnat humming to and fro in the air.

She took nothing with her excepting such things as had been absolutely her own, bought with her own money, earned by her own labor.

Howard Conway's friend was astonished to find all the little woman's treasures which she left lying about.

"But surely these are your own personal belongings, Mrs. Conway?" he exclaimed, in his surprise pointing to various photographs in pretty frames which stood on a little table near the drawing-room window.

"No, they were not mine," she replied. "They all belonged to Captain Conway and of course, they go with the house."

"But my dear lady," and here he grew quite affectionate in tone—"surely, you are interpreting the letter of the will too literally. My friend Howard Conway is the last man in the world to wish to be hard on a woman—a young woman—his uncle's widow. He will not expect or wish you to leave such purely personal things as these behind."

"I prefer it," said Mary.

“Most ladies in your circumstances would have stripped the house,” he persisted—“and would have left nothing but the bare chairs and tables.”

“Perhaps. But I am not one of those ladies—and besides, I wish to take nothing away to remind me of—of”—

“Yes?”

“That I once lived here,” she said, with a sudden flash of feeling, the first that she had shown.

“Oh, well, of course if that is the way the”—he had been on the point of saying “the cat jumps,” but broke the homely simile off short—“if that is how you feel, Mrs. Conway, it is no use my suggesting anything else.”

“But it is very kind of you to feel an interest in me,” said Mary, a smile breaking over her face for the first time. “I shall never forget it. I thank you.”



A few minutes later she had passed out of the house and away from her old life forever.

She had made her plans carefully with a view to furthering her resources to the uttermost, she had taken a single room in a respectable house in Bloomsbury. She was not destitute, for she had still nearly a hundred pounds to call her own. Mrs. Hamilton's life had been insured for a sum which had almost covered the cost of her illness and burial, and Mary had bought her mourning with a keen eye to economy, in fact she had spent and meant to spend nothing that she could possibly avoid. She knew that if need be she could live for a year on her little store and she knew too that it was a totally different thing to seek a living free and independent as she was, to seeking it while tied and hampered with an invalid mother.

But she did not find it an easy thing to

drop into a pleasant, comfortable position such as she wanted, by no means. For several weeks she tramped to and fro, here and there, always seeking something more or less indefinite, a something which she found it difficult to describe in words.

Then she pulled herself up short and began to think the situation out in a different way. And she came to the conclusion that she could not go on in this vague, indefinite way, that she must make up her mind to follow a certain course and she must follow it. The question was what? She went over all the openings which she had already tried to follow up and she came after much anxious cogitation to the conclusion that there were only left to her now, either of which she might take as her *métier* and train herself to become proficient in—there were nursing and typewriting.

She enquired fully into the merits and de-

merits of both. She found that she could not properly qualify for a nurse under a training of at least three years. Even then she would not have got to the top of the tree and it was more than likely that long before three years had gone by she would have broken down, for she was not physically or constitutionally an especially strong person. If all the tales she heard of hospital or infirmary training were true, she felt that a month or six weeks would about show her how fruitless it was for her to attempt a career of which magnificent health and nerve are the very first requisites.

So practically the career of a nurse was disposed of and put on one side as an impossible one. There only remained then open to her that of a typewriter.

The accounts which she gathered of this way of making a living were more hopeful. She would pay ten guineas to be taught the

trade and six months would see her in a fair way of earning a decent living. She could, until she was proficient, live very cheaply and quietly in her modest little room, and she would have every interest in forcing herself ahead as quickly as possible. There was nothing in the manipulation of a delicate and intelligent machine (this was the way that a young girl, whose acquaintance she made in a tea-shop, spoke of her typewriter,) which could be in any way revolting to her, or which was in any sense beyond her powers.

“And, of course,” said the girl, “if you go in for shorthand as well, you just double your value from the very start.”

“Is it difficult?” Mary asked, rather diffidently.

“Yes, it is difficult,” the girl replied, “but by no means insurmountable. And the advantages are enormous. Oh, it is a grand life

for a woman. Any woman of average intelligence can make a living at it and a woman whose intelligence is above the average can do more than make a living. She can command her own price. Then it is a free life! I mean in this way. If a woman goes in for nursing, she needs years and years of training and goodness only knows whether she will prove herself a really skilled nurse at the end of it. She needs superhuman strength, endless patience, infinite tact; and for what? To earn at best two guineas a week, to be treated a little better than a servant, to be always in a position that is entirely temporary. A typist on the other hand, especially if she is also a stenographer, can easily make a hundred a year, provided that she is really good at her work. She has her fixed hours, her fixed holidays. She has always her Sundays and her Saturday afternoons. All the tact that is nec-

essary for her is to mind her own business and hold her tongue. She has her evenings to herself and, if she likes, she can get extra work then so as to put by an extra sum to her ordinary earnings for her summer holiday. It is a fine life for a woman—there is no mistake about that.”

The result of this chance meeting and conversation with an utter stranger was that Mary went straight away to a certain school of typewriting and at once entered herself as a pupil for the entire course. And then she set herself to work.

She was an apt pupil. Her well-balanced mind, tinged by disappointment and trouble but unruffled by the greater passions of life, quickly grasped the intricacies of the curious dots and dashes which seem so mysterious and confusing to the majority of mortals. She made rapid progress, and before the six

months, which she had allowed herself for her pupilage, had come to an end, she found herself established in the office of a small firm of brokers at a salary of fifteen shillings a week.

It was, of course, but a beginning. Still it was a beginning and Mary had accepted it gladly, both for what it brought her and as an earnest of better things to come. And each evening when she had left the office and had had tea at the nearest X. Y. Z. shop, she went off to the school and worked hard at her shorthand.

A few months more saw her in different circumstances, for she left the firm of brokers and engaged herself to a lawyer of large practice who paid her thirty shillings a week and treated her pleasantly into the bargain. After nearly a year in this office her employer suddenly died and she was thrown out of work.

Not that she was destitute—by no means.

She had lived carefully, almost frugally, keeping always in mind the possibility of a rainy day in time to come. She took a week's holiday and spent it at Dovercourt, where she sat by the glorious sea, basking in golden sunshine and the keen brisk air, revelling in novels and drinking in a full supply of health and strength which would last her for at least a year to come.

Among the books she had taken down with her was one which had been lent to her by her one intimate friend, the girl, Lucy Chalmers, who had first given her information about the life and career of a typist. Mary had been three golden days by the sea ere she began to read it—it was called "A Lover's Creed of Love."

It is almost impossible for me to tell the effect that this story had upon Mary Conway. It was a story of passion passionately written.



It was fervid, full of life and stir and color, and it was clean and wholesome in tone withal. It was unmistakably the work of a man rich in imagination who was yet full of common sense and sound judgment. It fascinated, enthralled, amazed her. She went to bed and dreamed of it.

She read it over again several times during the rest of her week's holiday, leaving the other books unread after the first glance into their, to her, meaningless pages; during those few days she lived with it.

Then she went back to London. She was feeling stronger and more really free just then than she had ever been in all her life before. She was independent, she stood face to face with the world it is true, but it was no longer a world of which she was afraid. She stood firm upon her own feet. She owed not a penny to any man.

Her first errand was to go to a great shop where typewriters are sold.

“I wish to put my name down on your books,” she said.

“As typist?”

“And stenographer.”

“What is your speed?”

“One hundred and twenty,” said Mary, with quiet assurance such as carried conviction with it.

“You are used to our machines?”

“Yes—I have used no other.”

“Well, if you will give me your name and address, I will let you know if anything suitable offers itself.”

“Thank you. Mrs. Conway, 201 Wellington Street, Bloomsbury.”

The clerk wrote down the name and address and Mary turned to go. “By the by,” he said, “I don’t know if you wouldn’t be just the

one for a gentleman now on our list. Let me see," turning over the pages of a big book—"‘Lady—not young girl—quiet—must have speed over a hundred.’ You might go and see this gentleman. I’ll give you a card. It is Mr. Alan Stacey, the novelist.”

“The author of ‘A Lover’s Creed of Love’!” cried Mary, breathlessly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ALAN STACEY, THE NOVELIST

IT was with a beating heart filled with nervousness and apprehension that Mary Conway found herself waiting at the door of Alan Stacey, the novelist's house in Fulham.

It was evidently a somewhat old house and was enclosed in a high-walled garden. It was at the gate of this garden-door that she waited patiently after giving a humble little pull at the handle of the bell such as she would not have given at the door of a duke. At last she rang again and then her summons attracted attention. She heard footsteps on the other side of the door and then it was flung open and a man in the usual decorous garb of a servant stood to hear what she wanted.

“Does Mr. Alan Stacey live here?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Is he at home?”

“Mr. Stacey is not out, ma’am,” the man replied, “but he does not usually see any one at this hour. Mr. Stacey is in his study, ma’am.”

“Still I think he will see me,” said Mary, eagerly, “if you will give him this card.”

“Walk this way, ma’am,” said the man, taking the card between his finger and thumb in the peculiar manner of a well-trained servant.

He led the way down a broad flagged pathway which led to the house. It was covered by a kind of veranda and on either side a charming garden spread until bounded by the old wall. It was a charming garden, rich in ancient, mossy turf and gay with many flow-

ers. All manner of creepers entwined themselves about the pillars which supported the sheltering roof overhead, and great hydrangeas bloomed at the bases of them.

The house was long and low, had long windows opening like doors, and a wide veranda running its entire length. This veranda was paved with brilliant colored tiles on which were flung here and there rich-looking rugs. Huge, easy chairs, wicker tables and a hammock made a pleasant lounge, and there were flowering plants everywhere.

“Will you take a seat here, ma’am?” said the man, indicating a large chair. “I will enquire if Mr. Stacey will see you.”

Mary sat down and he disappeared into the house. She sat drinking in the pleasant scene, doubly pleasant after the arid stretches of Bloomsbury bricks and mortar to which she was accustomed. To her it seemed like a syl-

van retreat far, far away from the rush and turmoil of cities where strife lives. She could hear her first acquaintance the servant speaking and a man's tones answering.

"All right. I'll come out," said the man's voice.

The next moment a tall man in light grey clothing came out by the window. . . . Mary was in Alan Stacey's presence.

"Mrs. Conway," he said, looking at the card in his hand and then at her.

Mary sprang to her feet. "Yes, I am Mrs. Conway," she said, tremulously. "Messrs. Bloomingby thought that I should suit you."

"As a typist?"

"And stenographer," she added, quickly.

"Pray sit down," said Alan Stacey, kindly, and himself pulled a chair near enough to talk with ease. "What is your speed as a shorthand writer?"

“A hundred and twenty.”

“Good! You look intelligent which is more to the point. Have you been with any author before?”

“No,” answered Mary, “I have been with a solicitor—and that, of course, was work needing great care and precision.”

“Ah, yes. And why did you leave him?”

“I did not leave him,” she replied; “unfortunately for me he died.”

“I see. Do you think you would like my kind of work?”

“Yes,” said she, promptly.

“I am not very easy to work with. I’m as crochety as most other literary men,” Mr. Stacey said. “I have just got rid of a man, an excellent fellow, for no reason than that he sat on the edge of his chair and waited. I would have forgiven him many things but his waiting became oppressive—it killed every idea



I had. Before that I had a young lady. She knew Shakespeare by heart, and could quote Xenophon—but she would mend my copy as she went on”—

“Oh, how dared she?” Mary burst out. Mr. Stacey looked at her with a vague sense of amusement. “I assure you Miss—well, never mind her name, it is immaterial—but Miss Blank we will call her—thought very small potatoes of me. I can’t write by hand, I’ve got writer’s cramp and I have always a terrible lot of work in hand. If I had gone on with Miss Blank, I should have been as dead as a doornail by this time. She could not do my work without ironing it out as she went along, so that every vestige of style and individuality was eliminated completely.”

Mary gave a little gasp. “But I thought she took down what *you* dictated,” she said, almost breathlessly.

“Yes, but if she saw what she thought was an error she was always kind enough to mend it for me,” said Alan Stacey, smiling at the remembrance. “She knew just a little too much for me—she must have been over-educated or something. My last helper had on the contrary no ideas. He had a notebook and a sharp-pointed lead pencil. When I was in form he was excellent. When I had to get a certain amount of copy turned out by a certain time and I hadn’t so much as the ghost of an idea in my head, he used to sit on the edge of a chair waiting till I did get an idea. If he would have read the newspaper, gone to sleep, walked about the garden—if he would have yawned even I should not have minded; but he never did. He once said it was all in the day’s work whether he worked or waited. So when I couldn’t work, he waited. I had to get rid of him. I found him an excellent

billet and swore I would never have another helper of any kind. Then my hand came in and said 'No, I'm hanged if you shall use me. I'm delicate.' So I sent to Bloomingby's. So now, Mrs. Cosway, you see what kind of man I am to deal with—nervous, irritable, almost eccentric."

"I am not afraid," said Mary, smiling. This man was wholly delightful to her, surrounded by a halo of romance, still young, strong, unconventional and wholly human.

"Have you seen any of my work?" he asked.

"I have read the 'Lover's Creed' a dozen times at least," she answered.

"Ah! Then you will to a certain extent understand me. I should need you from ten to five each day—well, not on Saturday afternoons, that goes without saying."

"I am ready," said Mary.

“You would lunch here— By the by, where do you live?”

“In Bloomsbury.”

“That’s a far cry.”

“I should seek for rooms in this neighborhood,” she said, quickly. “I am not wedded to my present quarters.”

“Still better. You are married, Mrs. Cosway?”

“My name is Conway,” she said, gently. “I am a widow.”

“Oh! forgive me. One likes to know everything. Have you children?”

“None—nor a single relation in all the world.”

“Poor little soul!” The words slipped out unconsciously, as if he were thinking aloud. “Then about terms?”

“I will take what you are accustomed to pay,” said Mary.

“I gave—let us say two guineas a week,” he returned, hurriedly.

“But, won’t you try me first?” said Mary, rather taken aback by this unceremonious way of arranging the matter.

“No—no—your speed is a hundred and twenty—and you *look* as if you would just suit me.”

“But my references!” she exclaimed.

“Mrs. Conway”—said the novelist, turning and looking directly and fixedly at her, “I would just as soon not see your references. I know too well the lies one tells when one wants to pass some one on to one’s friends. I know too well what they are worth. Your last employer died you tell me”—

“But it mightn’t be true,” she faltered. “I would really rather”—

“Do you want a character with me?” he broke in.

“But everybody knows you,” she cried, ingeniously. “Everybody has read your books.”

“I wish they did—I should make a decent income then. No, no, Mrs. Conway. I know what I am and what I’m not. I know my own limitations and exactly what I am capable of. It’s my business to read character. You may not suit me as a secretary—but only time can show and prove that. So far as you yourself are concerned, honesty is the dominant note of your life.”

Mary could not help starting. Alan Stacey continued, “You give yourself away continually because you cannot conceal your real feelings. In a sense you are bad for yourself because you cannot dissemble. You couldn’t tell a downright lie if you tried—and you are so honest that you wouldn’t try.”

“I do hate lies,” said Mary, in a tone as if

such a fact were rather to her detriment than otherwise.

“Let me look at your hand. Yes, it is capable, precise, upright and highly nervous. We shall be able to work together very well, I am certain. At all events, let us try tomorrow morning.”

“Mr. Stacey,” said Mary, rising as she spoke. “I will do my very best.”

“We shall get on splendidly,” he replied, holding out his hand. “I am doing a particularly difficult piece of work just now, a most difficult subject in which the handling is everything, the whole difference between success and failure. I was writing with my fist—yes, doubled up so—in despair when my servant told me you were here. Look at this”—spreading out his hand and showing an angry swollen red ridge of muscle which rose between the first and second fingers and

extended beyond the wrist. "That means the intensest and most exquisite agony—it seems to disappear above the wrist and to rise again in the under side of the arm, from where it runs in a rope of pain to the very arm-pit."

"It must be horrible," said Mary. "Are you working now?"

"I was when you came."

"Why don't you let me begin right away, sir?" she ventured to say.

He looked at her again with the same quick, alert glance as before. "Don't call me 'sir,'" he said, half amused and half irritable.

"I always called Mr. Desmond so," she said, meekly.

"He had an office and a lot of clerks, that was different. I don't require that kind of thing. One 'sir' would upset me for a morning. Come into my study. I like you for



tackling the work straight away.—We'll try how it goes.”

Mary followed him into the study, a long, low-ceiled room with many books, a few pictures, some guns, fishing-rods, golf-clubs, two luxurious sofa-lounges, and half-a-dozen capacious chairs. A rough terrier dog lay before the open window and a big Angora cat brindled like a bulldog was in possession of a fur rug before the empty fireplace. It was a revelation to Mary Conway—she had never seen such a room in all her life before.

She established herself at a table and they began. She was amazed at the ease and rapidity with which Alan Stacey poured out his story, taking it up at the last written word and spinning it out in the most vivid and interesting way, almost indeed acting it all. So for nearly two hours they worked without a hitch, until the servant came to say that

luncheon was served. Alan Stacey drew a long breath and rose to his feet.

“Come to lunch,” he said. “I used to have ideas about not interrupting the flow of genius—but I take my meals at regular times now—it pays better all round. Do you think you’ve got all that?”

“I think so,” said Mary. “If you will allow me, I will transcribe it after lunch so that you can see for yourself.”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INTERPRETER

To Mary's surprise the table was only laid for two persons. It was essentially a man's table, it was small and was spread with a nice clean cloth and serviettes; its dominant note was a cruet-stand.

"Take that seat," said Alan Stacey, with a gesture to a chair. "It will be a simple lunch, I warn you. If I eat a big meal now, I am no good for the rest of the day. Some people like a regular dinner at midday—I believe it means apoplexy if you only eat enough and sleep soon enough afterward. What have you to-day, John?"

"An omelette, sir," said John—"and cold beef and salad."

“A luncheon for a king, if the omelette and salad are properly made, don't you think so, Mrs. Conway?” said Alan Stacey.

“I do,” said Mary, wondering whether she ought to be honest and say that a dish of scrambled eggs was the nearest approach to an omelette that she had ever tasted in her life.

“I have a little Frenchwoman who makes both to perfection,” he went on. “Some people like to make a salad at table—I don't. I know several delightful houses where it is the task of the young ladies to dress the salad, and they do it with a diffidence which results in loathliness. Tell Maltide that this omelette is excellent, John.”

“Very good, sir.”

Mary ate her portion and allowed herself to be persuaded into taking a little more. But she refused wine and persisted in taking only

water. "I must keep my head clear," she said, firmly. "I want to do your work and myself justice this afternoon."

Alan Stacey tried hard to overrule her because as he said they ought to have a mild celebration of their first day's work and their first meal together. It is true that he liked and respected her the better that she held firmly to her point.

"When the book is finished, Mr. Stacey," she said, "if you then think my work worth celebrating, I will do it with pleasure. As yet you don't know whether I have not made the most fearful hash of your work—or whether I may not turn out to be ten times more aggravating than either Miss Blank or the good gentleman who did not mind waiting."

"I don't think so," he said in a tone of conviction.

His instinct proved to be correct, as the instinct of a man who has given his life up to the study of character usually is. After a delightful luxurious half-hour of chat, Mary went back to the study and began to work, and by five o'clock had finished her transcription of the morning's work. Alan Stacey, who was as keenly interested in the result of the experiment as she was, came in from the garden and read over the fair typewritten pages. He did not speak till he had read to the end.

"Mrs. Conway," he said then—"you are a perfect treasure. Can you keep it up?"

"How?"

"You have taken me down literally, word for word, point for point. You have caught the exact spirit of my idea—Mrs. Conway, if you can keep it up, we shall get on splendidly."

She had flushed up scarlet in her excitement and suspense and Alan Stacey looking at her said to himself that surely his star had been in the ascendant when such a dainty creature had suddenly fallen from the skies in lieu of the bulldog features and staring goggle eyes of the patient individual who had but just left him.

“I am so glad,” she said, with her pretty, shy air, “so proud to be able to help you. I’ll try hard never to be anything but your interpreter.”

He laughed aloud and held out his hand. “That’s a good name for you, Mrs. Conway,” he said. “I can never say ‘my typist does this’ or ‘my stenographer does that.’ You’re not my secretary—and it would sound pretentious to call you so. But ‘interpreter.’ That’s a splendid name for you. I shall always call you by it.”

And so he did. She went that very evening and looked at various rooms in the neighborhood, fixing on some in a quaint out of the world nook which they call "Parson's Green." I don't mean all that intricate bewilderment of small featureless little streets which lie between Fulham Palace and the cemetery, but a corner on the other side of the railway line, a corner which then was still rejoicing in tall old trees and spacious wide-fronted houses, such as kept an air of dignity about them which came as a surprise to the stranger wandering through the neighborhood.

And then began a long spell of hard work, yet work that was intensely enjoyable in character. It is almost impossible adequately to describe the effect which this way of earning her living had upon Mary Conway. She was still quite young, little more than a girl, and during all her early years romance and



the joy of life had never had any chance of growing and flourishing within her.

There is nothing of romance about the life of a board-school mistress, more especially when under the continual influence of a mother who never forgot her gentility or that her daughter was the child of a gentleman. The board-school mistress who can love and be loved again by a young man whose sphere is the same as her own, a young man whose aims and ambitions are on a level with her own, can revel in romance as entirely as the hero of a novel or the lord of the manor. A young girl may spend her life in the stuffy class-room of the state schools and yet invest her lover with all the tender and idyllic romance of a knight of old; but if she is cut off by class-grade from intercourse with those men among whom she is thrown by circumstances, all the romance which may be in her

heart is of necessity bottled up for sheer want of an outlet.

Mary Conway, frail and delicate of being as she was, gentle woman to her finger tips, a girl in whom all the signs of good breeding were present to a very marked degree, was of a nature in which romance was indigenious, and until the time when she became associated in work with Alan Stacey, the novelist, no sort of outlet had afforded itself, and all the natural love in her heart had been pent up until it was filled nigh to bursting and was ready to overflow at the first kind word from a sympathetic soul, at the first touch of a kind hand, at the first glance of a pair of magnetic eyes.

In Alan Stacey, Mary found not an employer but an idol. From the first day she worshipped him. I know that it is not a commonly accepted idea that a woman should love

a man at first sight. In a sense she did not do so; and yet, she idolized him! The possibility that one day she might be something more to Alan Stacey than his interpreter never for a moment entered her head. But she loved him with a dim, far-off, almost a religious feeling. He was so brilliantly clever both in his work—for where were such vivid, brilliant, haunting human books to be found as those which bore his name?—and in himself. There were times when he worked at fever heat untiringly, restlessly, almost passionately, times when the fit was on him when he almost wore her out calling on her to come early and to stay late, times when they snatched their meals and when she went home to her bed dog-tired and brain weary.

Yet always with the same charm and sweetness of way. “Mrs. Conway, I must get on with this while the idea is alive in me— You’ll

help me through it, won't you?" or "Need you go? I know it's time, but cannot we take a little holiday when it's done? Surely it's best to make hay while the sun shines."

At such times Mary Conway would willingly rather have died than have failed him! At others he would laze through the days, letting his work slip into brilliant easy gossip, telling her his ideas, his hopes, his aspirations, making her look over his great collection of stamps, help to arrange his autographs, discussing furniture or the next smart little tea-party that he meant to give, and apparently wholly unconscious that she took any more interest in him than the man who waited had done.

"What was your father?" he asked her suddenly between the pauses of his work one day when Christmas was drawing near.

"A clergyman—he was curate of Elphinstowe," she replied.

“Ah! you were young when he died?”

“Yes—quite a child.”

“And your mother?”

“She died after I was married.”

“I see! Forgive me for asking—but were you long married? Well, of course, you couldn’t have been, you are still so young. But did you lose”—

“I lost my husband only a few months after our marriage,” Mary said, rising suddenly from her place at the little table where she worked and going to the fire, where she stood nervously holding her hand out to the warmth and keeping her face half turned away from him.

“He was—he was—I mean was he—was he”—

“He was a sailor, captain of one of the Red River Line of Steamers,” said Mary, almost curtly. “He was drowned.”

There was a moment’s silence. “It must

have been a great shock to you," he said at last. He was busily occupied with a paper knife and a slip of note-paper, and spoke in a studiously indifferent tone as if they were discussing some question absolutely impersonal to both of them.

"It killed my mother," said Mary, still warming her hands.

"And you?" he rapped out the question in a strange, breathless fashion.

Mary looked aside at him. "Why do you ask me this, Mr. Stacey?" she asked, brusquely. "I was beginning to be happy—to forget all the horrid past. I'll tell you and then never, I entreat of you, speak of it again. I sold myself because my mother was ill and because she yearned to be well-off. I was honest with him and he professed so much. I told him I did not love him—and—he took me. Our marriage was a failure, a most dismal failure.

I was wretched—I hated and despised him. He was bitter and mean and vindictive toward me. My poor little mother was the only one who got any sort of satisfaction out of the bargain and she did not have it long, poor soul, for the news of the loss of the *Arikhama* killed her, and it was as well, for he left every penny away from me. As for me—I won't pretend to be better than I am; I won't sham; I'll tell you the truth; I thanked God when I found that he was gone. Yes, I did, for I would have put myself in the river before I would have lived with him again."

"He was older than you?"

"Many years. He is dead and they say we should never speak ill of the dead. I can't help it. He was a brute; only a few weeks after we were married—*he struck me*. Oh! why did you ask me these questions?—I had almost forgotten—at least I did not always

think of it as I did at first. Why did you ask me?"

With two strides Alan Stacey was by her side. "My dear, my dear, shall I tell you why I asked you?" he cried. "Because I had a vital interest in wanting to know. I've always had a sort of feeling that you belonged to that dead husband of yours, that he stood between us, keeping us more widely apart than if all the world stood between us. Can't you understand that I wanted to know—that I—Oh! Mary, child—don't you understand that I love you and I cannot live without you?"



## CHAPTER X

### A NEW ARRANGEMENT

WHEN Alan Stacey had once broken the ice sufficiently to have told his love to Mary Conway, he did not, by any means, let the grass grow under his feet. Mary drew back a little; partly because the pleasure of being betrothed to the man of her heart, the man of her brightest and most fervent admiration, was very great. It was natural enough. Her first engagement had been a dry-as-dust business, an arrangement which was altogether in the light of a bargain. There was no bargain between her and Alan Stacey, only the sweet and unspoken bargain of trust and affection, mingled with the respect and admiration which the one had for the other.

There was no question between them as to whether he would give her a dress allowance, or as to what housekeeping money she would have to spend; there was no question as to whether she would be able to do her duty to him. No, they loved each other, and that was enough for both.

“But,” he urged, “there is no reason why we should wait. We have nothing to wait for. You have no relations, and mine do not interfere with me. As to your vague and indefinite suggestion about clothes—well, I don’t know much about ladies’ dresses, but it seems to me that you can get a couple of new frocks in a week, and that when we come home again you can buy as many garments as you find you will want. Don’t, when we have both been lonely and wretched apart, don’t let our happiness wait for anything so paltry as clothes. Let us be married at once.”

“But it seems so soon,” said Mary.

“Not at all. We cannot possibly pull it off under a fortnight, and we know each other so well. There is nothing like working together for getting to know somebody.”

“But the story?” she urged. “We must finish the story.”

Alan Stacey looked grave for the first time. “Yes, I had forgotten the story. Little woman, what a business head you have. I promised it for the end of the month, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did.”

“Yes, I should like to finish the story; but, perhaps,” cheerfully, “if we were to push on we might be able to manage it.”

“There is still half of it to do.”

“And I shall want you. I can’t let you spend all your days at the old typewriter now. I wonder if I could work with anybody else?”

“You are not going to try,” said Mary speaking in decided tones, for the first time.

“Is there no way in which one could ease you a little?”

“Oh, yes. Let me have a good typist in the afternoon, and I can dictate the work off very much more quickly than doing it myself. But I don’t see why I can’t work just as usual. What difference is there? The fact that I know you love me need not turn me lazy all at once.”

“No, nothing could do that. But I shall want you more with me. You forget that up to now I have done my morning’s work and have been free for the rest of the day, and you, poor little soul, have sat here fagging your heart out, as I don’t mean to let you do when we are married. Of course I would rather work with you—because you are you, and you know my thoughts almost as they

come; you interpret me to perfection. But, at the same time, I shall want more of your society than I have had in the past."

"I see no way," said Mary, "excepting, as I suggested, a typist who will work at my dictation."

Eventually she gave way, and consented to be married as soon as the proper arrangements could be made. It was all so different to her last marriage. Then, everything had been arranged for her; now, everything was arranged so as to fall in with her slightest wish. Her first husband had had very little to offer her, when put in comparison with Alan Stacey. Captain Conway had been elderly, rough, plain, and only comparatively well-off. He had demanded impossible things, and when he discovered that his desires were impossible of gratification, his love for the girl whom he had sworn to pro-

tect and cherish had been curiously intermingled with an absolute hatred. His was the kind of nature which to begin with says—"I will teach you to love me," and afterward, "If I cannot teach you to love me, I will kill you!" His was the kind of nature which says—"If I cannot bend, I will break;" the nature which looks at every situation of life from its own standpoint, and judges all the world entirely by its own doings. It is always this kind of nature which is inherently dominant and essentially domineering. And how different was Alan Stacey. He, gifted, intellectual and brilliant, was content to lay everything at the feet of the woman he loved—all the fame he had won, the position he had made, the wealth he had amassed. His desire was not to be his wife's master but her knight; not to feel that he was conferring honor and status upon her, but to assume al-

ways that in giving herself to him, she was laying him under an everlasting and delightful obligation.

It was but natural that Mary was not only filled with love but with a boundless and unbounded admiration. This was the man at whose feet she would have been content to sit for the rest of her life, not daring to lift her eyes higher than his knees. This was her king among men, gifted and blessed with the right royal inheritance of genius. This man who asked so little, who gave so much, was not one who had power only over a handful of men. No, the name with which he was endowed was one which was known, and known approvingly, throughout the world; known wherever the English language was spoken; nay, more than known, for it was loved.

I do not wish to portray the character of Alan Stacey as that of a perfect being; in-

deed, I must own, what Mary had found out very early in her knowledge of him, that his besetting sin was idleness, which is the besetting sin of most spinners of stories. He was beset too with idleness of two kinds, the genuine and ordinary sort and the idleness which afflicts the brain-worker. It is only your nobodies who are thoroughly industrious in art; great genius is always subject to what is usually called "idleness," in other words to brain-fag. To my mind the most pathetic record that we have of George Eliot, is where she conveys in a letter to a friend that she has no natural desire for work, and has to flog her brain continually so that she may get her promised task completed in time. She too speaks of it as idleness. And with that same kind of idleness Alan Stacey was continually afflicted, as he was with a real love of doing nothing.

In times gone by he had many a day sat



down to work in the morning, saying, "Now, Mrs. Conway, I have got to work to-day; I have got to work hard. Now, you keep me up to it." And no sooner had Mary inscribed half a dozen lines in her notebook, than he would get up and say, "By Jove, there's another robin building its nest in that holly bush!" or some such remark, which was interesting enough in itself, but which did not help upon its way the story then in hand. And often and often Mary had had all her work cut out to keep him chained to his task, and after they had come to an understanding with one another, it seemed to her as if he never meant to work again; as if he could not keep his mind off their plans for the future, and as if any and every subject was more interesting to him than the fascinating romance upon which they were then at work.

"Yes, we will go to Monte Carlo," she said,

at last one day, "but we will not go to Monte Carlo, or to Paris, or to church, or anywhere else, until you have finished this story. Come, now, I am waiting to hear what you are going to do with Evangeline now."

"I think I shall chuck it up," was his reply.

"No, no; to that I resolutely decline to be a party. I am not coming into your life to ruin you. You have to finish that story, before we can dream of being married. Come, pull yourself together; think. Evangeline is standing at the top of the staircase, wondering what is going to happen next."

Well, in due course the story was finished, and when the last words had been taken down, he asked her eagerly what she thought of it.

"Give me your candid opinion," he said.

"I think," said Mary, "that it is by far the greatest book that you have ever done."

And then they were married, going quietly to church one morning, attended only by a great friend of Alan Stacey's, and the girl through whom, indirectly, the marriage had come about—the girl who had first given Mary the idea of taking up typewriting as a serious profession. Then they went back to the Sycamores and had a dainty little lunch, at which they made miniature speeches, drank each others' healths, and were as merry as if the party had been one and forty instead of but four persons. Then, at the last moment, just before they rose from the table, the best man thought of something.

“My dear chap,” said he to the bridegroom, “there is one thing about which you have given me no instructions. What about the announcements to the papers?”

“Need it be announced?” asked Mary.

“My dear Mrs. Stacey,” replied the best

man, "it is absolutely essential. Bohemian as Stacey is—has always been—he is yet, at the same time, a *persona grata* in society, and unless your marriage is announced formally, and immediately, I am afraid that it will not be so pleasant for you when you come home again. Here, give me a bit of paper, Stacey. Tell me how you wish the announcement to be worded, and I will see that it is in all to-morrow's papers."

Alan Stacey got up and fetched a sheet of paper and a pen and ink from the writing table in the window.

"Give it to me," said Mary. "This is my idea what to say." She took the sheet of paper from his hand and wrote clearly and firmly—"On the tenth, at the Parish Church, Fulham, by the Rev. F. D. Johnson-Brown, Alan Stacey, only son of the late Colonel John Stacey, Bengal Staff Corps, to Mary

Conway, daughter of the late Rev. George Hamilton.”

She handed the paper across the table to her husband, and he, knowing her well, realized instantly that her horror and detestation of her first marriage had remained with her to such an extent that she would not, even in the formal announcement, identify herself with the man who had commanded the “*Arikhama*,” the man who had bought her with a price, the man who had given her the only blow that she had ever received in the whole course of her life.

## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE TOP OF THE TIDE

ONE of the rules of Alan Stacey's life was that when he took a holiday, it should be a real holiday. He was not one of those persons who combine business with pleasure, and make themselves an annoyance to their friends by keeping the bogey of work ever present with them.

They left London immediately after the wedding, going by slow and easy stages to Italy, and for three long, delicious months they revelled in luxurious happiness. Alan Stacey made traveling so easy. He was content to travel for pleasure; he detested people who made it a business.

"No, my dear sir," he said one day, to an

enthusiastic American who was badgering him to go and see an Etruscan tomb, "I have not been, and I do not mean to go."

"But, my dear sir, it is your duty to go, you ought to go, you ought to improve your mind, you ought to see all that there is to be seen. This is a wonderful specimen, a real old Etruscan tomb, you may never have another opportunity of seeing one so perfect and interesting."

"I don't care," said Alan Stacey, doggedly; "I came here to enjoy myself with my wife. My wife doesn't care about tombs, and I don't care about tombs. All the Etruscan tombs in the world will not be the smallest use to me. They do not interest me, and they do not please me, and I refuse to be badgered into meditations which only irritate and annoy me. Do you go and look at the tomb—and stay there—I shall not complain, I shall

never grumble at your choice of a habitation!"

"Poor thing, he means well," said Mary, when the energetic sight-seer had departed.

"I dare say he does," Alan replied, with a laugh, "but I wish he'd go and mean well somewhere else. Let us move on. You said yesterday that you would like to go to Bella Villia; let us go to Bella Villia and lose him."

They worked their way home from Italy at last, returning by way of the Riviera, and the middle of May saw Mrs. Alan Stacey settled in the beautiful old house at Fulham, with what was practically the world at her feet.

How happy she was! She had been used to think that no matter what fate awaited her in the future, the horror, the sickening dread, the terror, the repugnance, the shuddering misery of the past would always be with her. But it was not so. Time, the wonderful physician,



taught her to forget; and by the time she found herself installed in the Fulham house she might, so far as her feelings went, have been Mrs. Alan Stacey for ten years instead of little more than as many weeks.

On the very first morning after their arrival home she sent for the housekeeper who had been left in charge of the Sycamores at the time of their marriage.

“I sent for you,” said Mrs. Stacey, gently, “because it is better that we should begin with a clear understanding of how we mean to go on. You will quite understand that as I shall continue to help Mr. Stacey with his work, that I shall have no time for housekeeping. You understand Mr. Stacey’s ways, his likes and dislikes; he has been admirably satisfied with you in the past, and I would like you to know now that I desire to make no change. So long as you continue to satisfy your master,

you will satisfy me. You will please continue exactly as you have done heretofore—your accounts, your menus, everything just as before. Occasionally I may make a suggestion to you if there is some dish that I should like to have, or if we are having visitors I may like to make some little alterations in the menu, but as a general rule I do not wish to be troubled with any housekeeping arrangements.”

The housekeeper—who was a Frenchwoman and thoroughly knew the value of a good place—thanked her mistress and assured her of her fidelity and devotion.

Then Mary rang the bell, and when John came in answer to the summons she told him to shut the door, that she wished to speak to him.

“John,” she said, “I have just been talking to Madame Boniface, and telling her that I wish your master’s marriage to make no dif-

ference in the domestic arrangements. You have satisfied him for many years, and I hope you will continue to satisfy him for many years longer. I may have to give you a few orders, but on the whole I wish you to continue precisely as you have always done."

"You would like to have the key of the cellar, ma'am?" said John, politely. He had no more intention of giving up the key of the cellar than he had of giving up the use of his senses, but to make the offer was the highest compliment he could pay to his new mistress.

Mary laughed outright. "No, John," she said, "I do not think the key of the cellar would be of very much use to me. I am frightened of cellars, to tell you the truth, and I shouldn't know one bottle of wine from another. No, John; you understand Mr. Stacey's ways, and you will please just do for him as you have been accustomed to do. I don't

think that his marriage—our marriage—will make him more difficult to please. I hope quite the contrary. But thank you, John, for offering me the key of the cellar. I am sure it is a very great compliment, and I appreciate it highly.”

And then she smilingly dismissed him, and John went away feeling that after all his master had done the very best possible thing for himself.

Then she and Alan settled down to real hard grinding work. He declared many times that never in the whole course of his existence had he been kept to work so ruthlessly and so persistently as by his new task-mistress.

“By Jove, if I had thought that you were going to goad me on like this I should have thought twice before I asked you to come here for good and all!”

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t,” said Mary. “It is

very good for you, and you know you are perfectly happy, so don't pretend anything else."

And it was true enough. She certainly managed him and his work admirably; for by keeping him up to the mark for certain hours she was able to be free herself at a fixed time every day. And there was never an idle minute for either of them, for, as I said awhile ago, Alan Stacey had always been a *persona grata* in society, and his many friends all seemed but too anxious to receive his wife with open arms.

It was a brilliant life. All that was best and brightest in the great world of Art flocked to Alan Stacey's house now that it boasted of so charming a mistress. Mrs. Alan Stacey went everywhere and was noted wherever she went. Almost every day, in the columns devoted to the doings of well-known

people, there was mention of the brilliant novelist and his wife. Her dress, her receptions, her tastes, were continually chronicled, and for his sake—for Mary was singularly far-seeing in everything that concerned her husband—she put herself to immense pains in order that she should always create as favorable an impression as possible. She was essentially the very wife of such a man. She never attempted in any way to shine him down, rather, on the contrary, did she draw him out and show him at his best. She ruled his household with a dignity and simplicity that went to make her a favorite with all classes of his friends. Her great hold over him lay in the fact, that although she was possessed of no artistic gift herself she was never dull, was not in the least degree narrow in mind or judgment, that she was possessed of that scrupulous politeness which demands, as well

as gives, attention. At the end of a year—a year of wholly unalloyed happiness—Alan Stacey would as soon have thought of striking his wife as of omitting to pay her any of those small attentions which are as oil to the wheel of the matrimonial chariot. It was wonderful that it was so; because he had bestowed everything upon her; he had changed her life from one of toil, of comparative penury, of dullness, of loneliness, to a brilliant existence, the light of which she had never known, and which, had she known, she would never have dared to think could possibly one day be hers.

And as their happiness grew and throve apace, so did Alan Stacey's star of fame grow more and more brilliant. There had been at the time of his first great success croakers who had foretold that the star of Alan Stacey's brilliancy would wane in a little time. But these prognostications had proved to be

wrong. With every book that had come out, his genius was seen to be more intense and more brilliant. He had the magic touch, the subtle insight, the grace, the freshness, the romance and the poetry, which are needed to make a really great and lasting success. To some of us—to most of us, I should have said—the refining fires of sorrow are necessary. But now and again there shines upon the world a great mind which feeds on the sunlight. Alan Stacey was one of these, and the more the happiness of his life increased, the more brilliant did his work become. The untold satisfaction of his daily life, so far from cramping or stultifying him, seemed as if it but fed the fires of his genius, and it was a common thing in the set in which Alan Stacey moved for their union to be cited as an excuse, a reason, a justification, of the great and old-fashioned institution of marriage.



“Marriage a failure!” cried a great painter one day, when some theorist propounded the idea that marriage was frequently a failure because of the inequalities of intellect and attainments in those who were indissolubly bound together, “Marriage a failure for that reason—nonsense! Look at Alan Stacey—the most brilliant chap that ever sat at a dinner table, the most gifted speaker, a writer whose sway stretches all over the world. Little Mrs. Stacey has no attainments—she does nothing; a pretty little woman, manages the house and Stacey admirably; an ordinary, quiet, sensible, dignified little woman, who never makes herself cheap, who never gives herself away, and who keeps Stacey as straight as a die. How does she do it? Not because her intellect is equal to Stacey’s—not a bit of it; no, but simply because she’s the right woman for him. She is the woman he ought to have

married, and luckily for him, whom he did marry. She is a wise little woman ; not intellectual, no, that is a very different thing, but wise—wise in her management of Stacey. I don't know," the great man went on reflectively, "that she even has a temper, and yet, I fancy she could dust Stacey's jacket for him if need be."

"And you don't consider their marriage a failure, Sir John?"

"Stacey's marriage a failure! Good God, madam, what are you talking about? Stacey's twice the man he was before he married that little woman. I always regard her as the pivot around which all the brilliant gems of Stacey's intellect revolve. And it is necessary, madam, for gems of intellect to have a pivot that they can safely and rationally revolve round. And between ourselves—and not between ourselves for the matter of that—

I have always looked upon it as a very lucky thing for Alan Stacey that he happened to meet with the very woman who could make all the difference in the world to him!"

## CHAPTER XII

### AN ITEM OF NEWS

IT was just three years after her marriage with Alan Stacey, that Mary came downstairs one morning into the long, low-ceiled dining-room where breakfast was awaiting her. She received the noisy greeting of the rough-haired terrier with a kindly pat on the head, stooped and ruffled the fur of the great Angora cat as he lay before the cheerful fire. She turned to the manservant when he came in.

“Oh, John, Mr. Stacey has a headache this morning—the worst he has had for months—he says he will take no more than a cup of tea and two bits of dry toast.”

“Indeed, ma’am, I’m sorry to hear that,” said John, in a sympathetic tone. “It’s a long

time since the master has had a real bad headache. Thank you, ma'am," as she poured out the large cup of tea.

Mary sat down in her place and poured out her own tea. She was not worried or upset at her husband's indisposition, because he was a man who had all his life suffered occasionally from violent headaches, and he declared that since his marriage they had been much less frequent than formerly. She helped herself to some kedgeree, and opened one by one the pile of letters beside her plate, smiling over their contents now and then, as if she found the news they contained pleasant. Then, these disposed of, she took a second helping of the kedgeree—which was unusually good—and opened the newspaper, setting it up against the teapot for the greater convenience of being able to eat and read at the same time. Like all women she read the first column to

begin with, then turned the paper over to the middle sheet. In one moment the whole atmosphere and attitude of her life was changed, for there, in staring letters before her, was the heading "*Survivors of the Arikhama.*"

She caught the paper up from its position against the teapot, and thrust it down between the table and her knee, going on mechanically eating her breakfast, as if by so doing she could keep the suspicious announcement at arms' length. Then she found that although she had gone on eating she would not swallow the food that was in her mouth, and as she came to a realization of the fact, she choked the mouthful down and pushed her plate away.

"Survivors of the *Arikhama!*" Good Heavens! What did these four words imply? "Survivors of the *Arikhama!*" "Oh, my God, not that, not that!" she moaned out,

putting her hands up to her head and staring hard at the opposite wall. "Not that, not that!"

"Survivors of the *Arikhama!*" The trend of thoughts which the words called up was hideous—hideous—hideous. Perhaps, after all, he was alive! She passed her hands over her face to clear her eyes from the mist that danced before them. Her blood ran cold; her flesh seemed to turn chill; her heart to have stopped its motion; only her terrible thoughts went whirling, whirling, whirling on—to what? To the fact that Edward Conway might be one of the survivors of the *Arikhama!*

She looked down at the paper crushed upon her knee. "I daren't read it; I daren't read it; I will put it in the fire as it is. It will be better not to know! Oh, my God, what shall I do?" The survivors of the *Arikhama!*

Where had they been? Years had gone by!

“Oh, this is folly—folly! Pull yourself together, Mary Stacey, pull yourself together; nerve yourself, woman; don’t be a coward; face the worst, know the worst and get it over. Anything is better than suspicions, and the paper will tell you!”

So she took up the paper with nerveless, shaking fingers, smoothed it out and bent her eyes upon it. They refused their office. Merciful nature spread a curtain between her palpitating heart, her dazed brain, and the cruel news which the printed columns brought. She could see nothing.

She shook herself together. “This is foolish,” her heart said; “you are unnerved, Mary Stacey; rub your eyes hard and don’t be a coward. Read the notice.”

Slowly the printed words appeared through the mist—the merciful mist—“*Survivors of*



*the Arikhama.*" And then the paragraph went on to tell this wondrous tale of the sea. How a sailing brig, under stress of weather, had found herself driven upon a rocky islet in the far Pacific. It was not an unknown island but an uninhabited one, being too far out of the ordinary track of vessels, and too small and poor in quality of land, to make it worth while for any one to settle there. The sailing vessel, finding herself driven very near, put in to renew her stores of water, and, to the astonishment of the captain and crew, discovered three men and a dog in possession of the island. These were the captain and two of the crew of the ill-fated steamship *Arikhama*, who, after drifting about in an open boat for many weeks, and suffering unheard-of privations, had found themselves tossed upon this far-off strand, which had been to them, for nearly six years, a living grave.

Captain Conway and the two seamen were the only three out of nine who had survived the hardships and privations of that long and terrible voyage and the cruel life of isolation which followed. Then came a description of how the rescued men had lived. Penguins' eggs, occasional fish, and roots of various kinds, had formed their chief sustenance. The whole account ended with details of how the three men had wept like madmen on meeting their rescuers, and the concluding sentence said—"When we tell our readers that Captain Conway had only been married a few months when he set out on the *Arikhama's* last ill-fated voyage, it will easily be understood that his anxiety to have news of his wife was overpowering. The captain and crew of the *Lively Jeanie*, however, were not able to satisfy him on this point, but they sailed the following day for Melbourne, and Captain

Conway will set sail for home immediately on arrival at that port."

So she knew the worst, and worse than the worst could not be. So all her new-found happiness had fallen about her ears like a house of cards. All was at an end!

She sat there still holding the paper, staring with wild eyes round the luxurious room. So her happiness had all come to an end. Her radiant life was over. She who had been for three blessed years Alan Stacey's honored and devoted wife, must be outcast—outcast! She repeated the word over and over again to herself, as if to try by repetition to din its meaning into her bewildered brain. Could it be true? Yes. That heading still stared at her—"Survivors of the *Arikhama*." She had read the account. There was Edward Conway's name. It was all true—too true. And upstairs, ill and prostrate, lay the man who

had come to be all the world to her ; the man who had taken her, poor and alone as she was, and made her the mistress of his heart and of his home. And he was ignorant ! She would have to tell him—to tell him that she was not his wife—to tell him that she was the wife, and not the widow, of the man who had bought her with a price, who had outraged her, who had struck her !

And he had told that story of how he had been only a few months married to a young wife ! She wondered bitterly whether he had told them that he had so far forgotten his marriage vows that he had struck the young wife in those early days of their marriage ? Three years—three years—three wholly blessed years without one sad thought, without one harsh word, without one regret. Three years of pure and unalloyed happiness. Well, she would always have that to look back to. Perhaps

she ought not to grumble, or to be surprised that fate had been minded to bring her happiness to an end. It was like the registration of sunshine in London. Some people got a little happiness filtered out in dribblets over a long life of great dulness; she had had three blessed years of glory, and now the time would be all grey, like a London fog. She had registered three years of sunshine, and like poor London, she must put in the average of mist and fog.

She sat for some little time longer, indeed, until John came to clear the table. Then, from some woman's instinct of hiding the tragedy through which she was passing, she rose and carried the paper to the fire, and stood there reading an account of the fancy dress ball given by the Lady Mayoress of London, aye, and reading it attentively. They had been present thereat. Her dress was de-

scribed—her dress and Alan's—almost side by side with the words which told of the rescue of the survivors of the *Arikhama*.

Then John betook himself away, and she was once more left alone. She formed no plans, her dazed brain refused to take in anything more than the stern and bare facts. Edward Conway was alive—on his way home—eager and anxious to find her. And she was here, in the old Fulham house, masquerading to the world as Alan Stacey's honored wife!

And Alan would have to be told! He would have to see the papers; he would have to decide where she was to go, what she was to do, how she could best hide herself from the monster who had legal right over her.

She was still sitting there, when eleven strokes of the clock warned her that the morning was passing—when they should have warned her, for Mary did not move from her

place beside the fire. Then a smart housemaid came in with a message.

“Please, ma’am, master is much better, and if you have quite done with the paper, he would be glad if you would send it upstairs to him.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCEALING LAWFUL NEWS.

MARY'S first instinct was to carry the paper upstairs to Alan Stacey herself, to break the news to him there and then. But hard upon the heels of this thought came another. That he was but just over a very violent headache, and it would be cruel to tell him that moment. She therefore whisked out the middle page, and gave the rest of the paper to the maid.

“Tell Mr. Stacey that I will come up in a few minutes,” she said.

When the servant had left the room her first thought was how she could best conceal that part of the paper from Alan. Then she ran to the door.

“Alice, Alice—come back!” she called.



“Give me the paper. I will go up to Mr. Stacey myself.”

But she did not go up at once. She turned back into the dining-room, and deliberately tore the sheet containing the telegram across, so that the corner where the account of the rescue of the survivors of the *Arikhama* had been was gone. This she threw into the fire. Then she went up the wide shallow stairs and turned in at her bedroom door.

“My dear boy,” she said, in a tone as much like her natural voice as supreme effort could make it, “I really don’t think that you ought to be reading the newspaper—particularly lying down in bed—let me read to you.”

She sat down by the fire with her back to the light. Alan Stacey lay back among his pillows idly enough.

“I don’t care about reading, so long as you’ll

sit there and talk to me," he said, lazily. "Is there anything in the paper?"

"—No-o; an account of the ball last night, with our noble names in the paragraph. All the rest is pretty much as usual."

She glanced down the day by day column; gave him a list of all the items of news that might in any way serve to interest him; and after that they talked for a little while; and then Alan Stacey said that he might as well get up as lie idling there, and Mary went downstairs again, carrying the paper in her hand—carrying also her burden with her; carrying with her the knowledge and the conviction that he would have to be told; that she must be the one to break the news to him; that there must be no shirking it, no getting out of it; that it was a task which lay right in front of her, a task which she must accomplish—and the sooner the better.

Then she remembered that if she told him Alan would naturally ask to see the paper containing the news. But she had burned it! She felt—so strangely are we moved by trifles in times of great difficulty—that she could not endure to let him know that her first thought\* had been to hide the truth from him. Then how was she to account to him for having destroyed that part of the paper? Should she send out and get another copy? She did not like to do that; nor did she like to go herself—it would look so strange.

And then the thought came to her—Why tell him at all? Why say anything about it? Why break up and destroy their intense happiness? Nothing could be wider apart than the lives led by Edward Conway and Alan Stacey's wife. Why admit that she had seen the news that part of the crew of the *Ari-khama* had been rescued? Just now when

Alan was showing signs of over-work and about to take a holiday it would be cruel to deal him such a blow. A few weeks longer in her sunshine would make no difference to anybody but herself. Alan would never know—Edward Conway need never know—that she had been aware all along that three men belonging to the *Arikhama* had been rescued off an uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean. Why should she say anything? Why should she not at least let Alan finish his book—the greatest book he had ever done—take his holiday; and if the blow fell then—why, he would be the better prepared to meet it. It would be bad enough if Edward Conway discovered her, and the secret could not be kept any longer.

Having thus made up her mind to keep the news which had reached her to herself, she acted immediately. She destroyed the torn

sheet of the paper, and thrust the part which remained carelessly into the rack with the other journals, trusting to her own wit to keep Alan from wishing to look at it during the day. It was an off day with the young lady who typed to her dictation, so that she was free of any tie of work. She set herself to do some needle-work, in order that she might look occupied when Alan made his appearance, and she sat near the window stitching industriously, while her mind went over and over again such shreds of self-justification as she could find to salve her conscience. She told herself that it was not as if she had gone into an irregular union with her eyes open. She had truly and honestly believed herself to be Edward Conway's widow; and her marriage with Alan was her real marriage. What was it they said? "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of

Judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed if either of you know of any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it." Then came these impressive words—"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Surely, surely God had joined them; surely, surely, it had been by the permission of God that such a blaze of pure and innocent joy and glory had come into her life; surely she would be doing right to continue such a union. The most fanatical and bigotted lover of conventionalism could never wish that she should go back to live the life of shame and degradation which had been hers during those few months after her first marriage—after that barbarous sale of herself into which she had been driven by circumstances absolutely beyond her control.

Alan Stacey came down presently, and when

Mary noticed how haggard and ill he was looking, she thanked heaven that she had kept the news of Edward Conway's survival to herself. She exerted herself in every possible way to please him; coaxing him to eat when lunch time came, and being seemingly in the gayest and brightest of spirits. But nothing served to rouse him from the dull depression which seemed to have taken possession of him.

"I believe you ought to have stayed in bed," she said at last, as he sat moping and shivering over the fire.

"No; I'm better up," he answered.

"The book is weighing on your mind, dearest."

"Horribly," he replied—"horribly. I feel as if I should never finish it."

"Oh, don't say that. You've been burning the candle at both ends. You cannot do this work and go to fancy dress balls at the same

time. Why not let us slip away and finish it quietly somewhere? Supposing that we pack up and go to some quiet little place where we can work in peace and comfort; and, after that, we will go off on our long holiday?"

He caught at the suggestion eagerly.

"That's a good idea, Mary," he replied; "that's a very good idea. You'll take little Miss Winnington down with you?"

"Oh, yes; because there's a good lot to do yet. Oh, yes, we would have her down there with us. But the change, the fresh air, the sea, the restfulness, would all be very good for you, and would help you to finish it with half the effort it would be if we stayed at home. Shall we go off at once?"

"As soon as ever you like," he replied. "Where shall we go? Let us try some part of Cornwall."

"Well, dear, there's that little place that the



Alec Dugdales went to. They said the inn was so comfortable, and the cooking so good, and the little place so primitive and yet so sweet; and boating, and fishing, and cycling, and all that sort of thing you could do in perfection. Don't you think that would do for us? You know we cannot have a place too quiet until we are through the book."

"I think it would do splendidly. Couldn't we telegraph to-day and go down to-morrow? Have we any engagements?"

"We have no dinners; nothing that we couldn't easily break."

"Have we the address of the inn?"

"Oh, yes; it is called 'The Powys Arms.'"

She rang the bell, and then went to the writing-table to get the book of telegraph forms.

"I must send a wire to Miss Winnington. Of course, if she is not quite able to come to-

morrow she might come down the day after—which, perhaps, would be rather better. Oh, John, we are going down to Cornwall to-morrow for a week or two; I want you to send some telegrams off at once, and to arrange all Mr. Stacey's things."

"Very good, ma'am. You will take the machines down?"

"Oh, yes; and what about your fishing rod, Alan? There is very good fishing down there—so the Dugdales said."

"Then I had better take my tackle."

"Will this do, Alan? 'Have you rooms vacant, two bedrooms, two sitting-rooms. Wanted for to-morrow. Reply paid.'"

"That will do," said he.

She scribbled also a message to Miss Winton, and when John had departed and she was looking down the engagement book to see whether any notes of excuse would be neces-

sary, Alan Stacey got up and began walking restlessly about the room. At last he stopped in front of her table.

“What are you doing now?” he asked.

“I was just looking whether I should have to write to any one—excuses, you know.”

He stood with his hands thrust deep down into his trouser pockets, eyeing her approvingly.

“You’re a wonderful little woman, Mary,” he said in a very tender tone.

She smiled up at him and put out her hand to touch his.

“I’m glad you think so,” she said, in rather a quavering voice.

“Oh, my dear, my dear, I always think so,” he said, passionately. “It was the luckiest day of my whole life, when I met you.”

“And what,” said she, “do you think that it must have been for me?”

She was at that moment on the very point of breaking down and telling him everything. Then the sound of the sob in her own voice frightened her. No, she could not, must not, dared not, tell him just now ; now, when he had the weight of a great book upon his mind, the anxiety of a large contract before him ; when he was in a measure nerve-broke, and anxious and depressed. No ; she must keep the secret, at least for a time. It would be selfish to do otherwise. She owed it, even if it was a sin, as a small return for all that Alan Stacey had poured out at her feet ; she owed it to him. In this instance silence was her duty.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FROM THE CORNER WINDOW

As the train steamed out of Paddington Station on the following day, Mary gave a great sigh of relief; and Alan Stacey, whose spirits had gone up as high as the day before they had been low—for he was like all people of buoyant disposition subject to great alternations of temperament—moved his seat over to the one beside her, and put his arm round her waist.

“Little woman,” he said, “it is awfully jolly to be going out of London again, isn’t it, even although we are not going for a holiday? By Jove, that was a good idea of yours. What a wise little head you’ve got! I should have gone on fagging my heart out in that used up

atmosphere, and you came with your wonderful woman's wit, and solved the question in an instant. You women are wonderful creatures!"

She did not say very much; she nestled up close against him with curiously mingled feelings. On the one hand she felt that she was leaving her troubles behind her; on the other that she was only putting off the evil day for a little time. She felt that she was safe, and yet that she was insecure. She had gained breathing time, a resting-place; but that one day she would have to tell Alan Stacey the truth was as inevitable as that one day she would have to die.

"By the bye, did you remember to tell John to send the papers after us?"

"No, I did not tell him," said Mary.

She flushed up a vivid, guilty scarlet, for, truth to say, she had purposely refrained

from instructing the intelligent John on this point.

“Oh! Well, of course we can easily write and tell him to send them,” said Alan. “All the same, I don’t know whether newspapers are not rather a bore than otherwise.”

“You see,” said she, apologetically, “we generally go to hotels where there are papers.”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes, it is all right; I dare say we shall be much better without them if we find that the Powys Arms is not so luxurious as to have a London paper. Let us try it at all events.”

So they started on their pilgrimage without so much as a daily paper to tell them what was going on in the world.

It seemed strange to Mary herself that she was not more eager to know further news of the survivors of the *Arikhama*, but she was truly happier not to know. From that mo-

ment she flung herself into the present with an energy which was intensely pathetic, and Alan Stacey was more hopelessly in love with her than ever.

She had arranged with Miss Winnington to be in readiness to come if she should send for her so that they made acquaintance with the little Cornish fishing village without the restraint of a third person. They were like two happy children. The weather was lovely, the air soft and sweet ; and they tramped over the golden sands and prowled among the rocks, as if never a care existed in the world—or ever could do.

“You like this place, sweetheart ?” he said to her on the evening of their first day.

“I love it,” she answered. “I should like to stay here always. Alan, I don’t believe that a place like the Sycamores is good for you. It is too flat, too much shut in ; there is



not air enough for a brain worker. Let us give up London, and settle ourselves in some such place as this, where we can live more of the ideal life, and make up the waste as fast as we create it. I believe it would be good for both of us. There is that sweet old place we passed among the trees to-day—fancy having that for one's own. Fancy asking one's London friends to come down and spend a week in such a place as this! . What joy it would give!"

"Yes; but should we have any London friends to ask if we settled ourselves here altogether?"

"Why not? You have friends all over the world; you are not dependent upon London. Of course you would have your friends just the same."

"And you would really like to leave Fulham, to have no resting-place in town?"

“I am afraid I would, Alan. You see, I am not like you; you were born to it; you are well used to the rush and turmoil of life. I feel, sometimes, as if I could not get air, as if I were choking.”

“Everybody feels it in London, my dear; and when you’ve got air and are not choking, you feel bored to death; you feel you would give anything to be back again in the place where things hum, to be in the thick of the fray. It is vegetation to spend all your life in a quiet place, even a Paradise like this. But I tell you what we might do. I’ve had my doubts about the Sycamores for some little time. We might move into a flat—comparatively small—and take a cottage down here solely for work. That would pay better than setting up our tent in any such place as this altogether.”

“A cottage one could turn round in, Alan.”

“Oh, yes; I take it house rent is not very expensive here. At all events we will look round at all the cottages and see what kind of places are going. And—we must see first whether I can work in the dead stillness of a country life. Somebody or other called it ‘dead stillness,’ didn’t they? I once went down into the country to do a very special bit of work that I wanted in a hurry. I went down with Goggle-Eyes to a farm in Surrey. I came back at the end of a week dead beat, and, indeed, I never passed a week in such a continual din in my life! Did you know before that horses never go to sleep?”

“Oh, nonsense!”

“It is true,” said he, solemnly. “Horses never go to sleep; or, if they do, they walk in their sleep. My bedroom was at right angles with the stables where the farm horses lived. They kicked the walls, and the man-

gers, and the floor all night long. I used to go in and look at them foddered down knee-deep in straw; all still, silent, quiet—except for the pulling of the chains through the iron rings of the mangers. But as soon as I got into bed they all began, and they were never still for one minute until cock-crow!—never! At half-past three—or earlier—the poultry yard began. And then between the coming of the laborers, and the flirting of the young women—I don't know what they did, because the men did the milking—and the stentorian voice of the farmer bellowing his orders, I never got any rest at all. Goggle-Eyes slept through it. He said it was heavenly, it was so tranquil! I believe Goggle-Eyes would sleep through the Last Judgment.”

However, the “Powys Arms” proved to be an ideal working-place for Alan Stacey. He flourished and throve, and the work grew

apace, and Mary was more than ever set upon establishing a little seaside home of their own, a little retreat to which they could at any moment retire from the world.

At the end of three weeks the book was finished, and little Miss Winnington went back to London. Alan Stacey and Mary, however, stayed on at the curious, old-fashioned inn, spending their days in boating and fishing, and trying to make up their minds in what part of the world they should spend their holiday. If he had a preference it was for a yacht; but Mary did not fall very enthusiastically into the scheme, and he had always a lingering fear that she might have a special reason for not wishing to be on the sea. Therefore he forbore to press her to consent to this arrangement; for Alan Stacey would have done anything rather than in any way have reminded Mary of the great tragedy

which had freed her from her first husband. They talked of the Italian lakes, of the regularly beaten Riviera track, and lastly of Biarritz, with excursions over the Spanish frontier. Upon that they practically decided, yet they lingered in the little fishing village, from sheer inability to tear themselves away.

And during all this time they had never seen a London newspaper. Several times Alan Stacey had said in joke that they might as well be dead and buried for all the news they had of the world; and almost every day he declared that he must write to John and tell him to send on the papers. But as Mary did not write, it somehow remained undone; and they continued in their ignorance of passing events.

So nearly a month slipped by.

"We really ought to make a move, sweetheart," said Alan one afternoon, when they

were sitting on a rock, watching the sun sink slowly down into the water.

“Yes,” said Mary; “but it has been charming here. I don’t,”—with a great sigh—“I don’t think that the time has been wasted.”

“My dear child, no time could be wasted to me that has been spent with you. What a thing to say! Of course it has not been wasted. This place has served our turn well; but we both want change—you as well as I. Do you know, two or three times lately I have thought you looking quite careworn; and you have nothing,” looking at her anxiously and searchingly, “you have nothing to be careworn about?”

“Nothing,” said Mary. She could feel the sob in her throat; she wondered that he did not hear it. “I think you are right,” she said after a moment, “and that it is time that we

were moving on. You have quite decided on Biarritz, Alan?"

"As well as any other place. We have never been there; they say it is bright, and gay, and exhilarating. If we don't like it, we can move on somewhere else."

"Then we will go home to-morrow?"

"I think we may as well," he replied.

So she set about packing up her few belongings. She had taken only the most plain and simple serge gowns with her. A single trunk held everything that she had. She packed a good deal that evening, and in the morning she got up early and finished it off before breakfast time.

"I will just run down the village," said Alan, "and settle up with Jan Trevethick, and by that time you will be ready for breakfast."

"Yes, I shall be ready," said Mary, smiling at him.



She watched him go down the village street, with eyes full of pride and love. What a man he was! With what a swing he walked, with what careless, easy grace of carriage; a man every inch of him. She was sorry to leave the dear little Cornish village, and yet, she felt that the pleasant Basque town would be at once a change and a relief from the monotony of the life that they were then leading. She dreaded that one day Alan would wake up to dulness, for that, she well knew, would be the beginning of the end of their love. Yes; for both their sakes it was better that they should go to Biarritz and be gay. She would be quite safe there. Edward Conway, if he was really seeking for her, would never look for her in such a place as that. If he was on her track he would find her as well at St. Agnes as he would find her at Biarritz.

There ; that was the last ! She shut down the lid of her dress-basket with an air of satisfaction. Alan's portmanteau she had finished half an hour before. She would put her hat and gloves there on the dressing-table, so that she would only just have to run upstairs and fetch them after breakfast. She glanced at her watch. Oh, he had had plenty of time to get back from seeing the old boatman, and she turned to the window to look whether he were not coming. She only gave one glance. The window was at the end of the room, and commanded a full view of the irregular cobble-paved street. And as Mary's eyes were turned to look along it, she saw Alan Stacey and Edward Conway walking up the road together.

## CHAPTER XV

### TO THE BITTER END

MARY only gave one horrified glance along the village street, ere she cowered back behind the shelter of the white dimity curtains.

Yes; it was he! The man who in law owned her; the man who had bought her with a price; the man who had treated her as a bond-slave. He was not very much changed. His hair and beard were white, but his face was just as weather-beaten as of yore, and his gait had the same pronounced sailor's roll. He was apparently talking excitedly, and was gesticulating wildly with his hands. Alan was listening, as he lounged along with his hands in the pockets of his jacket and his pipe between his teeth.

The figures of the two men passed under the window and out of her sight, but Mary stood there like a woman who was petrified. Stood their, holding for support to the frail curtain, waiting for the blow to fall. She waited, as Marie Antionette may have waited under the guillotine. In five minutes it will be all over ; in four ; in three ; in two ; in one. It was close at hand . . . about to fall. Yes ! She tore herself away from the support of the curtain as she heard a footstep on the stair. Then Alan entered the room.

“ Well, sweetheart, are you not nearly ready for breakfast ? ” he asked.

The sudden revulsion of feeling, the overpowering sense of relief, almost broke her down. She caught hold of the dressing-table to steady herself, but for a second or two could not speak. At last she choked down the great knot in her throat, and asked him a question.

“Who was that you came up the street with?”

He never looked at her as he answered. He was doing something to his pipe.

“Oh, a chap who asked the way; that was all.”

“The way to where?”

“I directed him to Roathlyn. He is half way there by this time. Come, let us go down and get our breakfast.”

She felt that the risk was immense. She wondered what Edward Conway was doing in that part of Cornwall? She had never heard him speak of having been in Cornwall; she had never heard of his having any connection with any one in Cornwall or with Cornish people. And then she reminded herself, half bitterly, that she had known very little of him at all. But what was he doing here in St. Agnes? It was no use shirking the situation;

she must dare and risk all at this juncture. Nothing would be gained by cowardice. And, after all, he could never force her to go back to him. He could only, at the very worst, expose her; and in her case exposure would mean the world's pity, never its scorn.

She drew her breath sharp between her teeth, took her handkerchief off the dressing-table, and turned and went out of the room and down the stairs, Alan Stacey following. And in the best parlor their breakfast was laid, and in two minutes the delicate fried fish and golden fresh eggs were brought in.

"Fish or eggs and bacon, sweetheart?" said Stacey, as the apple-cheeked maid lifted the covers of the two dishes.

"Eggs and bacon, thank you, Alan," she replied.

She had never in her life felt less like eating, but it would not do to arouse suspicion by

refusing to try to do so. She poured out the coffee, and listened with a smile, that was not very real, while Alan told her of his farewell to the old boatman.

At last he stretched out his hand to her across the table.

“Sweetheart,” he said, “you are quite sad at going away. Would you rather stop here?”

She answered him all in a hurry. “Oh, no, Alan, no, no; I am all packed and ready. Don’t suggest such a thing. What should make you give me such a Lot’s Wife character as that? I much prefer to be going away. We have been here quite long enough. It is a dear little place, and you know I always want to stay in a new place forever, it is one of my characteristics; but I think I get tired of them—I think I use them up. I don’t believe I shall want to come to St. Agnes again.”

“Not even to have the cottage?”

“No,” trying hard to repress a shudder. “No, not even to have the cottage, Alan. After all, I think you are right; there is no place like London. We will stay at home a few days before we go on? What do you think?”

“Just as you please. I don’t see why we shouldn’t.”

“Nor I,” said she. For the thought had come to her, that if Edward Conway was hunting her down, there is no place in the world where you can keep yourself hidden so easily as in London. Nor would it be easy to find her, for she had not a single friend or acquaintance who had known her at the time of Captain Conway’s supposed death. At the time of her second marriage she would have written to Mr. Lawson—to whom she had only a few weeks before repaid the last in-



stalment of the hundred pounds at what pinching effort she alone knew. But he had just died, and with the other officials of the Red River Line she had no acquaintance. So long as she did not walk abroad there was but very little chance of her stumbling against her pursuer. Here, on the contrary, it was almost impossible to keep out of the way of any one whom you did not want to see. Presently she would have to drive three miles to the station, not, mercifully along the road to Roathlyn, but in the opposite direction. Still, it was possible that he might have changed his mind ; and in any case she would not feel absolutely secure until she was out of the neighborhood, until she was out of this desolation of woods and fields and into the safe shelter of the great city.

For one wild moment she wished with all her heart that she had told Alan when the news

of Edward Conway's rescue first reached her. But now that she had come face to face with the terrible and awful tragedy which would end—God alone knew how—she did not dare to speak. As she sat there, trying to force the egg and the delicate strips of bacon bit by bit down her throat, she recalled the very first time that she had ever seen him. How he had refused with absolute scorn to enquire into her character, how he had told her that honesty was the dominant note of her life—that she had many times given herself away by being too honest, by not being able to tell, at the right moment, the harmless, necessary lie.

And if I tell the truth, I must needs confess that she was, at this juncture, afraid to tell him—afraid to own that she had shared his life and love while the barrier of a great secret lay between them. She told herself that it

would have been so easy to carry the news straight to him then, that day when her horrified eyes had first fallen upon that announcement in the papers which was headed: "Survivors of the *Arikkhama*." It was not easy then; now it was almost impossible. She felt that she could not face the look of surprise in his eyes; she felt that if everything came out, and he should ask her to stay with him, that he could no longer ask it as a favor. So more and more she realized the need of keeping it all a dead secret, of hiding from Edward Conway as long as she could, and of trusting to blind chance and Providence to free her—to free her, this time, beyond all shadow of doubt.

There were still some trivial arrangements for Alan to make when they had finished breakfast. Gratuities to be given, one or two little bills to be paid, and the landlord's

account to be settled in full. She could hear him in the little room across the passage, explaining to mine host that he had no doubt as to the honesty of the bill; it was no use his going over the items; that he had not the least idea how many whiskies and sodas he had had, and that if he had no objection he would prefer to settle the account without any further arguments. Then she heard the landlord protest that they wanted them to come back again, and therefore he was particularly anxious that Mr. Stacey should go thoroughly into the bill, so that if there was anything to which he objected that he might meet him at once.

“My friend,” said Alan, “you will never make your fortune. Here you have entertained us to the best of your ability; you have satisfied both my wife and myself, and we are extremely obliged to you for all the

trouble and pains that you have been at to give us a good time. I am quite satisfied that the bill is all right, and that there is not a single item in it to which any reasonable man could raise any objection."

Then she heard the chink of money, and, from the silence that followed, guessed that the landlord was employed in the serious business of receipting the bill. She wondered how many more hotel bills would be made out, paid and receipted for their sojourn together. She wondered, if Edward Conway found her, and she decided to stay with Alan—if Alan did not wish her to go away—she wondered what people in London would say; how they would take it? She supposed that, in that case, Edward Conway would make it the business of his life to follow them round and explain to every one the exact position in which they were placed. Would it be better

to tell everybody? Would the story get into the papers? Would it be blazoned from one end of the world to the other that Alan Stacey's wife had a story as romantic as any of the thrilling pages which had come from his pen?

She bethought her, in her distress and anxiety, of a silly game called "Consequences," a game in which the last clause is—"And the world said." . . . What would the world say to them—to her? She did not know; she did not dare to think. Only she felt resolved that so long as she could keep the secret she would do so.

"And you will come back again, sir?" she heard the boniface say.

"Yes, I expect we shall come back again the next time I have got a spell of hard work on and want to get out of London. It is difficult to work in London," she heard Alan answer;

“it is difficult to keep free of interruptions and so on. We have enjoyed ourselves very much, I can assure you.”

Then she heard a heavy footfall entering the house. Her anxious, strained ears told her whose steps they were. They passed her door to the sanded bar, and then she heard Edward Conway's voice saying—“You have a lady here that is passing under the name of Stacey. Which is her room?”

Then there was a rush across the passage, and Alan Stacey burst into the room and caught her in his arms.

“My poor child,” he said, “I have been dreading this for weeks and weeks. The blow has fallen at last.”

And by some instinct Mary knew not only that he had known the truth all along, but that he had been the first of the two to hear it.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER

THERE was only time for a hurried whisper between them.

“You won’t desert me—you won’t give me over to him?” she gasped.

“Never,” he answered; “never, while I live.”

Then the door was pushed hurriedly open, and Edward Conway’s blunt features and burly figure appeared before them.

It was apparent to the meanest observation that the man was beside himself with passion. He stood just within the doorway, his hands thrust deep down into his trouser pockets, eyeing first one and then the other with his flinty eyes, and upon his lips was a terrible sneer.



“Well, Mrs. Conway,” he began at last; “have you no sort of welcome for me—your long lost husband, given up for lost years since —your little more than bridegroom? Still silent? Have you nothing to say?”

Her lips moved, but no sound came from between them.

“Still silent? No fond word of greeting? Too much astonished, eh? You made sure I was dead and gone, didn’t you? But Edward Conway is not got rid of so easily as that, don’t you think it. Edward Conway has been under for a good long time, and Edward Conway has got up again, and he has come back again to his happy home and his loving little wife that he left behind him.”

“You shall never come back to me! I would never have lived with you again—you knew it!”

“Oh, you’re thinking still of a bit of a tiff!

What's that between husband and wife. Have you never tiffed with this Johnny that you took up with as soon as I was gone?"

"This lady is my wife, sir," put in Alan Stacey, with dignity.

"Your *what?*"

"My wife, sir. Your turning up again, most inopportunately, may annul our marriage; but no slur will rest upon this lady. There is nobody who knows her that will not pity her, and pity her doubly, first, for having been married to you at all, secondly, for having been the victim of a terrible chain of circumstances. This lady did not take up with me—she married me with all due formality and blessing of the Church. Until you have legal proof that our marriage be no marriage, she is my wife."

"She is coming back with me," said Edward Conway, shutting his teeth hard, and

snapping the words out as if his lips were rat-traps.

“She is never going with you—she will never have anything to do with you again—never. She would never have lived with you again, under any circumstances. You took advantage of her; you bought her with a price. You ill-used her; I am ashamed to say it—but—you struck her—your little more than bride. And you can ask her, when she has tasted the sweets of a real marriage, when she has known what it is to live with a man who would thrust his hand into the fire rather than raise it against a woman, you can ask her to go back to the slavery and degradation of life with you! Think, my good sir, is it likely?”

“I don’t know whether it’s likely,” said Edward Conway; “I know what the law is, and I mean to have it!”

“I will never go back to him—never!”  
Mary flashed out.

“As for you, you Jack 'a Dandy,” Edward Conway went on, taking no notice of her interruption, “I didn't know you this morning, when I saw you standing talking at the old man's door. I asked you if you knew some people here who were passing under the name of Stacey? And you asked me what the man was like, and what he did for a living? I told you that he scribbled novels, and that I did not know what his appearance was. And you told me that you had never met him!”

“I never did,” said Stacey, with deliberate insolence.

“You told me that you did not know anything about him; and you sent me—you sent me—you sent me to Roathlyn! You told me that there was somebody—an artist, or a scribbling chap, or somebody who lived by his

wits, and who had a pretty woman with him, staying at Roathlyn. You thought you had got rid of me, eh? But you were beaten for once in your life. You live by your wits, do you? Eh? And other people have wits, if they don't live by 'em! I went down the street, after we parted at the door here, and I asked an old grandfather, who looked a cheery old soul and likely to know the neighborhood, I asked him if he knew any people of the name of Stacey? He put me on the right track. 'Why,' said he, 'that's the gentleman who is living at the Powys Arms—him I've heard tell is writing a story-book.' So I came back to find the gentleman who was writing a story-book."

"Then," said Alan Stacey, his voice very cutting and calm, "then my good sir, you can go back again. This is not the place in which to settle a dispute of this kind. I presume

you have a lawyer? I will give you the address of mine. No power on earth can force this lady to live with you again. She definitely refuses the honor. Everybody in London knows where I live—or if there be any that don't know they can very easily find out. I will give you every information."

"You will give me my wife."

"That I never will. While I have breath in my body, I will stick to the woman who took me in good faith, for better for worse. And if I know anything of my friends, they will honor her more for staying with me than they would if she went back to what some people would call her *duty* and you."

"Lawyers!" repeated Edward Conway, contemptuously; "I don't believe in lawyers between man and wife. Not a bit of it. It is all simple and fair and above board. I want nothing out of the way, but what I want *I*

*mean to have.* I married yon white-faced hussy because I was mad about her. I was a fool, but men are always fools in that way. I've been stuck on a desert island for nearly six years, where I've had nothing to do but to think about the wife who scorned me; and I thought—and I thought—that if ever I got back I'd make her eat her words, I'd make her come like a dog to my feet."

"Here, get out of this!" said Stacey, breaking in ruthlessly upon his raving—"Get out of this! There'll be no 'dog to your feet' about this lady; so, my good fellow, put that out of your mind at once. Take what steps you like. Enter a divorce—we shall not defend it—please yourself what you do, only take yourself out of our way. That's all we ask. At all events get out of this room. It's mine."

"And that—that is my wife!"

“That’s as may be settled in court afterward. Get out of my room.”

“Not without my wife.”

“I promise you you will, and you’ll go a good deal quicker than you like if you don’t get out at once. Now come; I don’t want to make a scene or a row. You’re an older man than I am, and I don’t wish to try which of us is the better man of the two. At the same time your presence is unpleasant to me, and distasteful to this lady, and the sooner you relieve us of it the better. Now, out you go!”

There was a momentary scuffle, and then the door was shut, and Alan Stacey’s back was against it. He and Mary were on one side of the door and Edward Conway was on the other.

On his side Edward Conway began frantically to beat at the door; then he kicked; and at last, when the stout panels showed signs of



giving way, there was a sudden cessation of the efforts to enter—a pause—a groan—and the sound of a heavy body tumbling to the ground.

“Hush! Something has happened,” said Stacey to Mary.

“Oh, Alan!”

“Yes; they’ve all stopped talking; I heard the landlord’s voice a minute ago. I shall open the door.”

“Oh, no; don’t, Alan. He may shoot you!”

“No, no. Listen. He has had a fit.”

And so it proved to be. The excitement, the great mental struggle, and the physical strain to which the unfortunate man had put himself in trying to force open the door, had all done their work.

When Alan opened the door, it was to find Edward Conway on the stone floor of the

passage in a fit of apoplexy, and Mary was practically a free woman. They raised him from the floor and carried him to bed but he never spoke or showed signs of consciousness again. For a few hours he lingered, breathing heavily and with labor; and during all those hours of anxious waiting, Mary stayed down on the beach, listening to the beating of the waters upon the rock-bound coast, and wondering, wondering, whether Providence would be kind to her or not?

Then Alan Stacey came down to tell her that all was over.

“Dear,” he said, “this has been a horrible time for you. I knew as soon as the report came that they had rescued some of the crew of the *Arikhama*; I saw it in the evening papers. I have never been sure whether you knew or not. Perhaps I was selfish to keep it from you; but I felt that I could not—could

not—come and tell you what would put you out of my life, out of my home—although nothing could ever put you out of my heart. Nobody will know anything about it now—unless, indeed, by the merest chance, when there would be neither blame nor ignominy attached to either of us. I told the landlord a lie. I told him that Conway had mistaken you for somebody else—and he believed it. I told him that it would be very unpleasant for you if, when his relations came down, you were mixed up in the story in any way, and I gave him a tenner to leave us out of the affair as far as is possible. He was most sympathetic. He will never trouble us. We will go back to London at once—we can get part of the way to-night—and as soon as possible we will be quietly married in some out of the way church, where nobody need know anything about us.”

“Dear Alan,” said she, “what out of the way

church will you find where nobody will know anything about you ?”

“Well, dear child, there are good souls in the world, who would not hurt us by blazoning forth this unhappy story. It is no great matter if the world does know ; it will be certain sure then that you and I are fast tied in Wedlock.”

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