

ing in her pride to wrap up the truth of her loveless, miserable marriage as much as possible from the gaze of all eyes.

She was not long in reaching Charing-cross and deposited the luggage as directed; then she hurried back to her work and her home as quickly as the humble but not expeditious omnibus could take her. Her thoughts went to the night before as she did so, and even in the sadness of her thoughts, in the dread and nervous fear that Rupert's strange act had suddenly aroused within her, she could not refrain from a faint smile as she recalled the prosaic and damp situation in which her old friend had made himself known to her.

As she alighted and made her way back to the lodgings, she remembered, with a pang of annoyance and regret, that Rupert had in all probability occasioned Sir Basil much inconvenience by his non-appearance at luncheon as invited.

Tired as she was, Justina dragged herself onwards to a post-office, where she dispatched a telegram to Sir Basil briefly apologising for her husband's

instant—a smile that did not linger, however, as he stood in front of the fireplace, very tall and distinguished looking, and let his eyes go about him in a casual way, taking in all the details of her humble home, but noting chiefest of all the tired pallor of her lovely face. "Thanks, very much, for sending me a wire," he went on, abruptly; "but it was not necessary, as your husband called on me early this morning, and explained that he would be unable to lunch."

Justina's hand that was resting idly on the back of her chair grew suddenly cold and rigid with fear and dread, and pain of pride.

"Oh! I—did not know Rupert intended seeing you," she said, and at the tone in her voice he looked at her keenly. She roused herself with an effort. "Please sit down, Sir Basil, and then I will give you some tea." She rang the bell and stirred the fire as she spoke, and she tried hard to smile and seem at her ease; but it was a terrible effort, and without understanding it entirely, he was yet aware of some emotion that was troubling her.

He had not the exact clue, though

Sir Basil chatted away as briskly as he could, but he was conscious of a dull sort of hurt at his heart as he watched her thin, delicate hands move gracefully about and read the unmistakable weariness and trouble on her face. He was the kind of man who could not endure to know that any woman should have to toil and struggle and fight the world, and he never realised how strongly this feeling was impressed in him till he sat there looking at Justina and noting the undeniable traces of labour and anxiety and sorrow written legibly on her beautiful young face and form.

He rose all at once and took the kettle from her hands.

"Let me do this; you look worn out; have you been working all day? Must you work like this, Justina? Is it so necessary?"

"I promised faithfully to send this manuscript down to-night," she answered, evading the full meaning of his words. And then she laughed. "How well you manage a kettle! Do you often make tea, Basil?"

"Very often," he assured her gravely. "For Molly hates all that sort of thing."

in silence. He understood better than words could have told him that this was the first intimation she had had of her husband's whereabouts. He honoured her for her proud reserve, but he had a deeper sensation of that dull pain at his heart, and a great yearning came over him to put his strong arms about this girl and carry her off to his country home, to his sister's genial care, to keep and hold her there for all time.

His anger and dislike towards Seaton grew unbounded in this moment, and he had a pang at his heart when he recalled the memory of that dead father who had worshipped and guarded his child in those bygone years as a treasure too great for earthly appreciation.

If Richard North could have stood where he stood now and gazed as he gazed upon that slender, toil-worn, grief-laden and delicately lovely girl, the heart of the father must have broken beneath the anguish of realising his daughter's cruel fate.

Basil roused himself to talk as unconcernedly and as lightly as he could. Until she herself allowed him to mingle in with her trouble he would



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absence, and stating he had been compelled to leave town unexpectedly. This done, Justina made her way back to her writing, and without attempting to eat much or indulge in a rest, she worked steadily on for another two hours.

She had come to a pause, and was sitting, pen in hand, gazing out of the window, when a ring at the bell roused her, and as she turned and rose from her chair, the door opened and Basil Fothergill was announced in a tone of considerable awe by the servant-maid.

Justina clasped his hand warmly. "This is really kind of you," she said, as he put down his hat and stick "a proof of true friendship to journey out so far when you are in town for such a short time."

"I hope you will believe in the existence of my friendship without any sort or kind of proof," Sir Basil said, with a smile on his lips for an

the experience he had had of Rupert Seaton a few hours ago had let him see more clearly and surely in Justina's sorrowful young life than she could have imagined it possible.

"I always make my own tea," she said, forcing her lips to smile and move lightly.

And all the while when the kettle was brought and the tea was made, and the pretty teneups set out on the snow-white embroidered cloth, her heart was burning and aching with this last shame that she knew only too well her husband had put upon her.

She had no need of words to tell her that Rupert had carried out the threat he had uttered the night before, and that the money that was being used to convey him, wherever he might be going, had come out of Basil Fothergill's pocket, borrowed as a loan that was never meant to be repaid.

He took up his cup and drank his tea quickly.

"When will you come and pay us a visit at Croome, Justina?"

She smiled.

"I must give you the children's answer—one of these fine days."

"I am not a child, and that does not satisfy me."

"I should like to spend a little while with you," the girl said, gently, "but I fear—"

She paused. "I think I could not make you any definite promise, Basil; I am not quite a free person."

He put his cup down in front of the fire.

"When does your husband intend to return from Paris?" he queried, abruptly.

Justina gave a start.

"Paris?" she repeated, involuntarily, and then she paused, while the hot colour stole into her cheeks.

Sir Basil watched her a moment

not venture to intrude upon it, but he registered a vow that come what might he would range himself henceforth in the background of her life as her true, her faithful friend, her protector even if need be.

He had no exact knowledge of the real truth touching her marriage, but he could guess pretty nearly at that truth, and a single glance at Rupert Seaton's fair, evil face that morning had been enough to assure him that the qualities and characteristics that had made the boy so detestable were but too surely pronounced in the man whose lot it was to call Justina wife.

"I feel we are indeed old, old friends," the girl said when Sir Basil rose to go finally. "It seems almost as if we had never been parted—as if we were back again in the dear old rectory garden, and by-and-by we should go across the lawn and meet dully coming to look for us."