them both with a zest and an eager-ness that might have been said to constitute the only pleasure she

them both with a zest and an eagerness that might have been said to constitute the only pleasure she knew.

Rupert Seaton had been wise in his generation. His young wife possessed the braius and the faculty for carning good, steady money; his wants were amply supplied to cover his detestable idleness and selfishness. He began to assume a sort of invalidism which deceived and appended to Justina not a little at first because his fair, handsome presence was suggestive most certainly of inherent delicacy of constitution and feebleness of physical force.

She learned, however, by degrees, how much truth there was in Rupert's ill health, and how much more faithfully this delicacy might be expressed in other and barsher terms.

Of late a subtle and not easily to be defined difference had made itself manifest to Justina in her husband's bearing. There had come a change upon him, a sort of restlessness and excitement not in keeping with his usual languid, luxurious idleness. She attributed it a little to the fact that about six months before Rupert had made the acquaintance of some young men who belonged, the girl feared, to a rackety, foolish, extravagant set, and who were as wanting in honour and chivarry and any of the higher and better qualities of the mind as Rupert could desire.

Since the introduction of this George Aynesworth and one or two others Rupert had given Justina many hours of deep, anxious, distressed thought. She was perfectly willing to work her hardest to sustain them both in a simple, straightforward fashion. The life she was able to provide was not by any means a fuxurious one, but it was not devoid of comfort or of a certain humble pretriness, but it took all her time and strength and courage to keep this life going.

and strength and courage to keep this

and strength and courage to keep this life going.

To find money for Rupert to fling away on folly or extravagance in any shape or form was quite beyond Justina's means, and yet of late her husband had made serious inroads on her limited purse, and had shown a desire to surround himself and dress himself in a manner that filled the girl's heart with alarm and with contempt.

girl's near and tempt.

The connection with this Aynesand this companions boded no The connection with this Aynesworth and his companions boded no good to them, that was soon evident to Justina, and indeed the girl had begun to ponder and trouble what her best plan would be to sever her husband from these companions, and to save herself from further anxiety, to say nothing of pain to her pride and her seuse of honour. She had long ago relinquished all hope of seeing Rupert turn to work. His first bitter lesson in this knowledge had been taught early.

bitter lesson in this knowledge had been taught early.

Soon after their marriage he lost the small appointment he had held, and Justina, in her sorrow, had made personal application to see if it would not be possible to regain this post, which, though small, had been a cer-tainty.

tainty.

The reception she met with, though conreteous enough as far as she was concerned, sent her away crushed, humbled, suffering. It hurt her to have to realise that the man she had married should be one and the same with the man whose character and conduct had just been denounced in such plain, severe terms.

She never told Rupert what she had done. He would have merely shrugged his shoulders and called his late employers by some strong and ill-chosen word. She only knelt down when she was alone and prayed for help and courage to bear her burden as well and as bravely as she could. And so the time had gone on, the days had grown into weeks, and the weeks into months, and now it was a long two years since she had left her uncle's home, and plunged herself with all her beautiful youth into an always of mental trouble and perpetual labour.

Somehow, however, it was not until this night to a stream of the control to the c The reception she met with, though

Somehow, however, it was not until this night, as she sat with her head lowed on her hands, and tears of flaming blinded her eyes as the old sweet memories of the past crowded so thickly upon her, that the full bitterness of her life seemed to be revealed to Justina—that the contrast with the present and the past was made clear to her; that the hopelessness of her future struck her with such despuiring force. Weary, heartsick and deso-Somehow, however, it was not until

late, Justina, as she roused herself at last to attend to the claims of her inexorable duty, was tempted out of the depths of her sorrow to wish almost that the pleasure of meeting again with Basil Fothergill might have been denied her altogether.

The pleasure had so quickly turned to pain, and Justina was already overburdened with that ache of the heart which is none the less sure because it is unseen and unshared.

it is unseen and unshared.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER IV.

To Justina's surprise and alarm when she arose the next morning, after a short rest of about three hours, in which neither good nor peaceful sleep had come to her, she found her husband had not returned home. This was an unusual occurrence, though there had been many times when Mr Seaton had not artified at Mr. times when Mr Seaton had not arrived at his proper destination till a very late, or perhaps it would be better to say a very early hour; he had hitherto never fulled to make his appearance in the little home sustained and made so bright and comfortable by his wife's unaided exertions.

Rupert was a keen appreciator of his own comforts, and Justina's efforts on this score were decidedly agreeable to him. Consequently be never failed to make every use of

never failed to make every use of them.

This last development made Justina measy and burt her extremely. Not that his absence caused her regret from those feelings which reign, as a rule, in a wife's heart, but hecause she feared every new move on Rupert's part must be productive of fresh anxiety and pain to her. She swallowed a hasty breakfast and went back to her work with a tired head and a heavy heart.

She had no clue to Rupert's possible whereabouts. These men with whom he now associated never came in contact with her. She had only seen George Aynesworth once, and she had conceived an extreme repugance to the man. He was to her vulgar and something worse. The term adventurer seemed stamped all overhim. She shrank from him and his bold, admiring eyes, as she would have shrunk away from any repugant sight. Rupert had sneered at her for her coldness.

'You are so mighty grand, Justina!' he had said, when she had expressed

nant sight. Rupert had sneered at her for her coldness.

'You are so mighty grand, Justina!' he had said, when she had expressed her desire quietly, but emphatically, that Mr Aynesworth might never be brought into her presence again.

'You give yourself the airs and graces of a queen, Heaven knows why; I don't. I confess I don't see what you have got to be so proud about. Your father was only a school-master, and it is very evident from the way in which your mother's people keep namy from you that they considered him to be no better than he ought to have been.'

Rupert had paused here, expecting, perhaps, some retort from the quiet form that stood apart from him with averted face; then, seeing she would make no reply to his rude, cruel words, he went on peevishly: 'Welf, it does not matter to me, and I ment os stick to him!' an assertion he carried into steady practice from that day forward.

ried into steady practice from that

to steek to min; an assertion recented into steady practice from that day forward.

Justina had never questioned or endeavoured to find out in the smallest way what form of amusement her husband found so enjoyable in the company of his new friends.

Itad she been of a more suspicious nature or less harassed and engrossed in her work, it is certain that one question must have forced itself upon the girl's mind, and that question one dictated by the plainest of common sense - the query, indeed, as to how and where Rupert had obtained the smart new clothes and many other little appurtenances which now surrounded him, and carried an air of either money speut or credit given.

given.

Justina, it is true, did observe that Justina, it is true, did observe that her husband appeared to be more particular than formerly in his deess, and his constant demand for small sums of money made her heave a sigh over his thoughtless extravagance in this respect; but after all, the girl knew absolutely nothing about the cost of those sort of things which seemed so dear to her husband's heart. She had never been brought in contact with smart tradesheen, or known what it was to wear splendid gowns, and so much that would have excited instantaneous suspicion in the mind of another escaped her notice altogether.

She settled down to her work on this particular morning with a sense of measiness which was not lightly shaken off, and was most detrimental to her labour.

But work had to be done, and habit so quickly grows into the likeness of nature that Justina found her pen and her thoughts flying on apace almost before she was well aware of it.

Eleven o'clock came and no sign of

ware of it.

Eleven o'clock came and no sign of Rupert. She rose and moved about the room uncertainly. She could not help feeling alarmed, although a sort of bitter conviction within her told her surely that no harm had befallen her husband, and that settishness alone in some shape or form had kept him from returning home.

While she was walking to and fro, roubled and very sad, a telegraph boy made his appearance at the narrow gate, and in another moment the message he carried was in Justina's hands.

It was from Rupert, and was a

tina's hands.

It was from Rupert, and was a curt command with no kind of explanation whatever.

"Pack portmanteau with my things, and send to cloak-room Charing-cross by three sharp."

It was signed 'R.S.,' and had been sent from a post-office in the Strand.
Justina's pale, lovely face fusared botty for an instant.

She dismissed the curious good-natured lad with the words, 'No answer, thank yon,' and then sat down by the table and read the telegram a second and a third time. cond and a third time.

'What did it mean? Where was Rupert? What did he intend to do? Was he going for some pleasure trip

for a few days or was his absence to be longer? Who were his compan-ions? Where was his destination? The girl's proud, sensitive heart was stung to the quick by this treat-

ment. Her own nature was so warm, so generous, so full of gratitude, so full of noour, it was almost impossible to her to have to realise that any one, and more especially one wao owed so much at her hands, could act in so strange, so rude, and so inconsideration, amonome,

owed so much at her bands, could actius so strange, so rude, and so inconsiderate a manner.

There was, as has been said, no love in her heart for this man; but she had accepted him as her husband, she had grown to regard him as something that belonged to her, something for which she must work—a creature who depended upon her for the bread he ate and the shoes he wore upon his feet, and to have him go from her like this with no excuse, no explanation, no consideration in any shape or form, was most burtful to her feelings, and to her sense of what was due to her as a woman and her position as his wife.

She rose wearily enough after a little while and went to fulfil his command. Although she had no desire to do so, for she shrank from the possibility of his imagining that she wished to inquire further into his movements, she dressed herself when the packing was completed and fook the portmanteaux on a cah down to the station. She might perhaps have

the packing was completed and took the perfumnteans on a cab down to the station. She might perhaps have asked the servant of her lodgings to fulfil this task for her, but to do so would be to lay herself open to have all sorts of comment and conjecture passed upon this strange proceeding of Rupert's, and Justina had a yearn-

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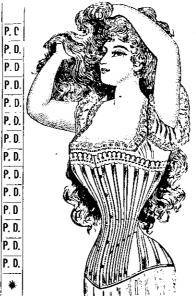
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