

two years ago. He's come back marvellous changed. It gave Tom such a turn."

"But did he ask for me?"

"Oh, no! He was surprised. He asked for Mr. Grey; his wife has come."

She looked at the beautiful unresponsive face at the door.

"We didn't know that Mr. Grey had come—or had a wife. It seems he married Mr. Osmond's sister, and that you all are friends, so Tom-us says. The young man had told him so. Then Tom-us said: 'Perhaps you'll find them both together and at the briar pool. I saw Miss Ward taking the river way. Some days she goes there every day, and some days every other day, and some days twice a day.' 'O, very well,' he said. 'I'll go there now.' Tom-us went too. He wanted an excuse to meet with Mr. Grey. I'm glad he's married," Polly chatted on, "although he never said—but there, he never talked about himself at all. He wrote and wrote, and when he didn't write he worked. My Tom is not like that; he'll talk of me until he's dead. It's just a way. I'm glad that Mr. Grey is married, after all."

"So you have said."

"Men left alone," proceeded Polly, "lose half themselves as well as half their clothes. It isn't only socks that get in holes; their morals do. The starch gets limp in men as well as shirts. I know, for Tom-us had a fall."

So the wife had come? Well, it simplified matters; the holes were for her mending after all, if she had the skill.

Her eyes for a moment saw nothing except the misty, rain-swept landscape. Then gradually forms began to emerge from the shadows. Was Frank Osmond returning with Howard Grey? Her first thought was of escape; she could not go through it all again, it was so useless! They could but arrive at another blank wall! But while she looked her face was whitening with a half-formed fear which momentarily took more definite shape.

Then in a shock of horror she understood. The men were bearing an inert form between them. It was Howard Grey—drowned!

Geraldine was sitting by the fire in the afternoon twilight, when Frank came out to her. She had not moved since Polly had led her there. All the bustle about her had passed unheeded. She was trembling as one stricken with illness. Frank spoke to her twice before she looked up. The dark eyes were dull with fear.

"*What—?* Tell me quickly!" she demanded in a strained imperative whisper.

"He has spoken," answered Frank.

His eyes matched those that looked into his for pain. His face was stern.

Her hand touched his arm.

"What did he say?"

"He was not conscious of his words," answered Frank, hurriedly. "No value can be attached to them."

"What were they?"

"'Why didn't you leave me alone?'"

There was a long pause. Frank came closer, and looked at the beautiful, white gracious face with beseeching in his own. Questions came to his lips which he forced back. He had until a few hours ago believed her sixteen thousand miles away. His retaliation upon his friend was so linked with the thought of her that he was startled to find her here. That, he said to himself, was the sole reason of his regret that she had not gone. Her beauty, her sorrow, the man's despair were so like the parts he had assigned that it seemed as though Fate had adopted his conception of chastisement. He moved uneasily to the mantel-shelf, and resting his elbow on it leaned heavily.

"What was it," he asked presently, "that Aurora Leigh wrote:

"'Why we weep

'Tis worth inquiry:—that we've shamed a life,  
Or lost a love, or missed a world, perhaps?'"

By no means. Simply that we've walked too far. Howard Grey 'had walked too far,' overtaxed his strength. He's been overstraining since he was a lad; he's been a profligate of his vigour——"

"Why do you say all this to me, Mr. Osmond?"

"To account for his collapse."