

sore with hopeless longing. Would Herbert Travick's wife, under similar conditions, have acted as Bessie had acted? He could not think it possible. Wherein lay the difference? Annie loved her husband. Bessie did not. There was the whole trouble in a nutshell. Bessie had never loved him, and that was his misfortune, he worshipped the very image of his absent wife, and that was his misery. Things must take their course, that was his conclusion for the twentieth time.

'Jack, old fellow shall we go to bed?' said Harry, rising. Jack yawned, stretched himself, and walked sedately to the curtains. Up the softly-carpeted stairs they stole, Jack leading the way. This was the nightly performance. Ah! Bessie Lingard! could you have witnessed the sad procession, could you have seen the fondly-foolish caress bestowed upon an old dressing-gown mercifully overlooked in your hurried flight, you had never, as wife, passed a peaceful night in the luxurious home of your maiden days. But of course only Jack, out of the corner of his sleepy eye, saw the pitiful action, and he never could tell you, though he tried his best to do so many a time.

CHAPTER II.

On Christmas morning, after exchanging greetings, Harry and his guests sat down to what he, accustomed to breakfast alone, could not but consider a cheerful meal. How could it be otherwise, under the fresh and genial presidency of Herbert's dainty wife?

Herbert resolved, as he expressed it, to introduce himself to his parents 'by instalments,' and to leave his 'better half' for the time being at Lingard's. Accordingly he and Harry drove down to Linden-Lea in a covered sleigh. The latter, having made his Christmas greeting to Mr. and Mrs. Travick, said:

'I have brought an old friend with me who would also like to wish you a happy Christmas. It is Herbert, your son.'

Mr. Travick grew pale and stern and his wife agitated.

'You will not refuse to receive him Mr. Travick? The poor fellow is ill—a mere wreck of his former self, physically, but in mind and soul a renewed man.'

'Oh, Mr. Lingard!' cried Mrs. Travick, 'where is he—my son?'

'He is waiting outside in the sleigh. I'll bring him in.'

In a few moments, leaning on Harry's arm, Herbert Travick re-entered the doors which had once been sternly, but not altogether unjustly, closed against him.

'A merry Christmas, mother,' said Herbert, cheerily.

'Oh, Herbert! my poor boy!' sobbed Mrs. Travick, with her arms around him. 'You are sick—dying perhaps—and you did not tell us.'

'Not at all, mother, only a nasty cold. I shall soon be all right again now. This is good of you, father,' said Herbert, wringing the outstretched hand of Mr. Travick, who just managed to say, 'You are welcome home, my son,' and then walked hurriedly to his own room, where he shut himself up alone with his joy and grief, for he feared that he had read death upon his son's pallid face.

Then a stately woman, with a pale, beautiful face and trailing robe came gliding down the stairs and flung her arms about Herbert's neck.

'Ah, Bessie, you naughty girl, I expected to meet you in your own house last night,' said Herbert, playfully.

'Herbert—my brother! But what a wreck! Your poor, thin cheeks!' which she kissed lovingly. 'Your eyes alone are the same.'

'I'm all right, Bessie, I tell you,' Herbert replied hastily, his eyes fixed upon his mother's anguished countenance. Then poor Herbert went off into a fit of coughing that shook the healthy frames of his

mother and sister more than his own.

Recovering, his eyes fell upon Harry Lingard standing in the doorway, a look of unutterable sadness on his face. Turning to his sister, he said, almost crossly: 'Bessie, don't you see Harry there?'

The sister flushed vividly, and with downcast eyes she gave her husband her hand for a moment. 'Accept my thanks for this—it is very beautiful,' she said, turning the bracelet on her wrist. And that was all that passed between them. Harry left the Travick family to their joy over Herbert's return and drove sadly to his own home.

During the afternoon brother and sister saw much of each other. Of himself Herbert said little, of his wife not a word, but of Bessie's husband he never wearied. He spoke of Harry's nobleness and generosity of character and of other excellent qualities which Harry did not possess. Certainly he liked to have his own way. What man, worthy of the name, did not? But he had a heart as tender as a woman's—more tender than that of one woman he knew. At all of which Bessie blushed, read and re-read the pattern of the carpet, and covertly pressed and kissed the charming bracelet she had worn from early morning.

In the evening Bessie withdrew to her own room and, after a short but satisfactory consultation with her mirror, arrayed herself in the most beautiful gown in her wardrobe. Never, even in her maiden days of conquest, had she taken such pains with her toilet. Then, enveloped in a rich, fur-lined cloak, she glided down the stairs. In the hall she paused. Yes, she would just look in upon them in the drawing-room. Opening the door, she stood for a few minutes a vision of warm, glowing beauty, her lips just murmured, 'Good-bye,' and she was gone, with her brother's hearty 'Good luck, Bess!' ringing in her tingling ears.

Alighting at her husband's handsome little villa, she was hurrying through the garden gate, when the driver called after her:

'Shall I wait, ma'am?'

'No—yes—you had better wait, Jerry,' she answered, and swept up the snowy path.

The window of her husband's sitting-room, with the red curtains partially drawn, looked warm and inviting. Yes, she would peep inside. It would give her time to steady herself and she would then know how best to act. With a happy little fluttering of heart and throat she stepped aside, looked in, and the shy expression of gladness gave place to painful surprise, passion, and despair.

Sitting side by side were Harry Lingard and a lovely woman, his dark curls almost mingling with her light, wavy hair. They were looking at the photographs in a large album. With a painful tightening of her heart strings, Bessie gazed and wondered. Harry had no sister she knew. And surely no woman any further removed in kinship had a right to be sitting alone with him and so close to him. Just then the two heads lifted, and Harry sat gazing at his companion with such an expression as Bessie never remembered having seen on his face, whilst the woman's beautiful eyes seemed brimming with tenderness and a gentle pity. As a matter of fact, Harry and Mrs. Herbert Travick were discussing Bessie's own beauty, as revealed in a group of excellent portraits, but Bessie did not know that. She only saw 'eyes looking love into eyes that spake again,' and the demon of jealousy entered into her and tore the veil from her soul, and for the first time in her brief married life she knew how much she loved her husband.

'And I made myself beautiful for this,' she said to herself in anguish. 'No wonder he never sought me!

'Lonely!' Herbert said. Very lonely indeed! And I have been breaking my heart and hungering for his love—love such as this. I will go home and never see or speak to him again. The hypocrite! with his shameless—oh, it is monstrous!' The last words burst upon the stillness of the night, startling her into consciousness of her situation. She was standing in the walk before the door. What was she to do?

'I am his wife,' she said in low, tense tones, 'his lawful wife. I will not thus be thrust from my rightful place. I will brave him to his face. When I do leave him again, she sobbed, and struggled for calmness and breath, 'he shall acknowledge that I have just cause.'

She noiselessly opened the door, crossed the hall, and with pale face, her beautiful lips curved with scorn and her eyes flashing defiance and unholy triumph—all unmindful of Jack's joyful welcome—she met the astonished gaze of her husband. Anger made her remorseless and dead to consequences.

'Harry Lingard!' she exclaimed, 'what does this mean? Who is this—this?'

'Bessie!' exclaimed her husband, startled at her appearance and tones.

'Who is this woman?' thundered Bessie, pointing at poor Annie.

'For heaven's sake!' pleaded Harry, 'don't speak and look like that. This is Herbert's wife—Mrs. Travick, Mrs. Lingard. Hasn't Herbert told you? I imagined at first you had come to see her.'

It would tax the powers of a kinesiograph to record the changes of expression that played like gleams of lightning over Bessie's beautiful features.

'Herbert's wife?—my dear brother's wife?'

The cloak fell from Bessie's shoulders and the two women were clasped in each other's arms—and Harry felt himself again left out in the cold—even Jack had no sympathy for him.

'Forgive me—oh, forgive me!' pleaded Bessie, in tones of the keenest distress. 'I didn't know. I thought—oh God, what a relief! I was so—so miserable, and now I am so happy.'

Then Bessie turned her warm, excited face to Harry and said:

'We must take her home immediately, Harry. I understand it all—and they will be so glad to see her. I believe the sleigh is still waiting. Run away, dear, and get your things on.'

Annie looked at Harry in perplexed inquiry.

'I think it will be best,' he said, in answer to her look.

Now, whilst Annie was away, Harry stood, man fashion, with his back to the mantelpiece gazing mournfully on the bent head of his wife, who all at once had become absorbed in the photograph album. Finally he said:

'Bessie, if you did not come for—for Annie, what did you come here for?'

'I came to—to wish you—a happy Christmas,' replied his wife, with heightened color but downcast face.

Harry sighed audibly and Bessie comfortably. Then Harry went into rhapsodies about Herbert's wife, about her love, her self-sacrifice, her labor and cleverness, her undying devotion to her husband. He had the pulpit, and he read his wife a fine little homily, manlike, undoing nicely the work that Bessie's own heart had been doing for him, and ended magnificently thus:

'Some women lift their husbands into a heaven on earth, and others take a wilful pleasure in driving them to the devil.'

Fortunately, perhaps, Mrs. Travick entered the room ready to start.

Annie was received with open arms by Mr. and Mrs. Travick, to whom Herbert had in the interval confided