

MY POOR WIFE.

BY J. P. SMITH.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was dawn—a cold, misty dawn—as I stepped, with a muffled tread, to my dressing room. I stopped and looked at my sleeping wife, and, as I looked, the ghastly idea struck me that I was not looking into the features of a sleeping, but a dead woman. The stony rigid repose, the waxen color of the skin, the fixed look of pain about the drawn mouth, all seemed to confirm my fear, until, leaning closer, a faint breath fanned my cheek and she moaned feebly. I stole away, swallowed a glass of brandy, threw myself upon a couch in my dressing room and soon sank into an uneasy dose. Helen's sleeping face haunted me. I dreamt that she was lying dead on the cliff, where we had so often sat together, and that when I stooped to lift her body in my arms a pair of bony hands closed fiercely round my throat, strangling my cries for mercy, dragged me to the edge of the cliff, where I fiercely struggled for my life. The hands I knew belonged to old Molly Griffin; but the face glowering over me was young William Hershaw's, distorted with passion. At last, with a violent wrench, I freed one arm, and seizing the hand pressing my throat, awoke to find Helen leaning over me, dragging her wrist from my clutch.

I looked at her stupidly for a second. "I—I am doing you no harm," she said, her eyes flickering and glaring at me stealthily. "I came to see why you had not come to bed. Let me go, let me go, I say—you hurt me."

I at once dropped her hand, and she ran quickly away to her own room. I did not see her again until breakfast, when she appeared in a lively, talkative mood and civilly disposed towards both Edith and me, though she never once looked us in the face, but kept her eyes almost closed or fastened to her plate. After giving some household orders she went out, and, standing by the window of my study, I watched her for some time pacing a retired corner of the kitchen garden with a swift, monotonous stride; at last the movement became so repugnant to me that, scarcely heeding what I was doing, I threw open the window and called out to her:

"Helen, I'm going to the club this morning; haven't you any shopping to do? The dog cart will be round in half an hour."

"No, none," she answered, after a moment's pause. "Besides, I have an engagement this afternoon. Ask Miss Stopford; she is sure to have some shopping to do."

She had, and we started presently, returning very hot and dusty late in the afternoon to find that Helen had failed to keep her engagement, which Edith casually informed me was a drive to the Flower Show at Brierswood with Sir William Hershaw.

"It was so hot, I felt too lazy to dress; I hope you had a pleasant drive," she said drowsily, her eyelashes still sweeping her cheeks.

"Almost unbearable coming back," I answered, throwing myself upon a seat by the open window. "I am nearly choked with dust; I feel I could swallow a quart of claret and soda."

"I'll get some," said Helen, going towards the dining room, and presently returning with a cool, frothing tumbler, which she handed to me and then stood behind my chair.

I turned, laid my hand on her arm, and said gently: "Helen, tell me what is the matter with you. Why will you not look at me—wife?"

She did not move or answer a word, though I repeated my inquiry almost coaxingly, as one would question a pettish, wayward child. I withdrew my hand and lifted, sighing wearily, the glass, when suddenly, with a loud cry, she dashed it from my lips, the liquid squirting up into my face, flowing down my shirt and collar and streaming onto the carpet, where the glass lay broken.

Stung to the quick by the insulting violence of the act, I sprang to my feet, glaring speechlessly at her until Edith, whose presence I was not aware of, ran eagerly towards me and passed her handkerchief over my wet face and neck. "How dare you?" I stammered hoarsely. "What do you mean? Are you mad?" Helen burst into a wild, loud laugh. "Yes, yes, mad—mad as a March hare—mad—mad—the maddest wife ever a true husband had. Oh, my poor head—my poor head—it aches—it aches! A breath of sea air would do it good—a breath of sea air!" she moaned, listlessly moving away. I went too, for even Edith's soft touch and pitying eyes were more than I could bear. Ordering my horse, I gave him his head, rode across country as if following the swiftest hounds that ever ran a fox to earth. I knew not whether or how far I went; it was night when the poor brute, lame, foot-sore, crawled up the avenue again. Edith was waiting for me on the doorstep, and led me into the dining-room, where a tempting supper was laid. "Eat, eat," she said; "you look thoroughly exhausted, poor dear."

"Fight tomorrow, you'll find. Now, dear boy, to supper, please."

The next morning I was awakened from a dreamless sleep by the housekeeper, Mrs. Murray—a valued and trusted servant who had served the family for nearly forty years—rousing me violently.

"What is it?" I asked, sitting up in my bed with a vague feeling of apprehension. "Has anything happened?"

"Hush, hush, master Paul," she said agitatedly, "we must keep it quiet as long as we can. Something has happened. She has gone."

"My wife?"

"Yes, when I went into her room this morning I found it empty and the bed not slept in; she is not in any part of the house grounds. That is all I can tell you."

Urging her to keep the other servants in ignorance if possible, I dressed hurriedly, and, my mind distracted with wrath, suspicion, vague terror and jealousy, sought in vain for any trace of my unfortunate wife. She had disappeared completely, without leaving a note or message; no one had seen or heard her quit the house, and, after a guarded inquiry at the station, I ascertained that she had not been observed by either guards or station-master taking any of the morning or late night-trains. Towards mid-day, feverish with anxiety, entirely baffled, I returned home. Calling Mrs. Murray, I begged her to get by portmanteau ready, as I was leaving at once.

"Where to—what are you going to do—tell me, Master Paul?" she pleaded, with a shaking voice.

"I'm going after him," I answered chokingly; "don't bother me, woman, but get my things—quick!"

"Him—whose him?"

"Hershaw; he left the Grange last night."

"Well, well, sir you know your own business best; but I think you're going on a fool's errand after him. I'd look elsewhere if I were you."

I seized her hands as a drowning man would a straw.

"Elsewhere?" I repeated. "What do you mean? Murray, Murray, you know, you guess where she is. Oh, don't keep me in suspense! If you knew what horrible thoughts torture me!"

"I know no more than you, sir, where she is," she interrupted sadly. "By elsewhere I think I meant somewhere near the sea. For the last week she's been talking about the sea, and sea-gulls, and rocks and things of the kind, and complaining of a pain in her head and a mistiness over her eyes."

"Of course, of course," I broke in eagerly. "What a short-sighted, dull fool I've been! She's gone to Donegal! I'll start after her at once and bring her home before the tales get about, Murray, I rely on you—"

"You may, sir; I'll do my best, never fear," she said impressively, laying her hand on my arm to detain me. "But—but, Master Paul, forgive me saying what I'm going to say. Having known you from your cradle, and, as it were, playing the part of mother to you when your own was taken so young—"

"Fire ahead!" I burst in impatiently. "You know you can say what you like to me, Murray."

"Then, Master Paul," she whispered hurriedly, "take my advice, and, before you bring your wife home, send the other away."

every visitor who came to the house every servant about the place, saw and commented on?"

"What did they see—confound them?" I blustered wrathfully.

"Saw that you were keeping a sweetheart and a wife under one roof," the old servant retorted bluntly; "saw your face brighten when you looked at the one, heard your voice soften when you spoke to her; saw you passing notes to one another, riding together, slipping away together ten times a day; meeting after dark, whispering together. Ah, Master Paul, Master Paul, does not your conscience this moment tell you what they saw and what brings the color into your face so cruel hot this minute? There—I've spoken out as you bade me, and I've said too much I dare say; but I couldn't help it. Send me about my business, if you like. I couldn't help it; it was wrong—wrong!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Without vouchsafing a reply, I seized my portmanteau, and flung it into the dog-cart waiting to take me to the station.

The next evening, worn out with suspense and anxiety, I sighted the old farmhouse on the hill.

Mrs. Casey was ill in bed, Mike informed me, and could not see any one, no matter how urgent or important whatever of my wife, or heard from her since she took my name, or heard from her within the last three months. She begged me to go away and let her leave this world in peace. She wished to be troubled no more with the affairs of this world, and, if I insisted on forcing myself into her presence, would refuse to give me speech.

I walked slowly away and stood on the edge of the cliff staring out to sea, wondering whether to turn, what to do next, when old Molly touched my elbow, and, turning to her, hope and relief lightened me in a flash.

"Molly, you bring me news. She is with you," I began eagerly, and then stopped short as she mournfully shook her head.

"No," she said, taking the pipe from her mouth, "I bring ye no news. I only heard half an hour ago what had happened. And the 'ould wan wouldn't see ye, wouldn't she? I was after thinkin' she wouldn't."

"You know nothing; you cannot help me?" I repeated blankly. "Oh, don't say that!"

"Nothing, my lad—nothing. She hasn't been here, an' I don't think she'll come now, poor little thing; ye began to ill-use her soon enough. Heaven knows! Well, well, I'm not surprised. I thought it would all end that way; but not so soon—oh, not so cruel soon!" she repeated, with a harsh laugh. "Ye might have spared her for wan year at the laist, for she loved ye true."

"Molly," I cried vehemently, "you— you don't understand. Listen to me! I— I tell you I would give every farthing I possess, my life itself, to find her now safe and well and—and teach her to forgive me! Do not judge me so harshly; but help me, help me, for there's not a moment to be lost!"

"I'll help ye as well as I can," she said, after a searching glance, "for I see ye're sorry, but I fear my help won't go far. Sit down beside me, an' I'll tell ye her mother's story to begin with, if ye haven't heard it already believe."

"Her mother died when she was an infant, she told me."

"Ay. When she was four days old her mother stole out o' the bed one wild night in November, an' flung herself from the stone on which yer sittin' down to the beach below. She was picked up in the bay next mornin' by the boys comin' home from the fishin', every bone in her body broke to bits—as cruel a sight as Iver maould eyes fell on. I couldn't get it out o' me sight for months after."

(To be Continued.)

Juvenile Jokes.

"Well, Johnnie," said the minister to a little fellow, aged 6, "I hear you are going to school now." "Yes, sir, was the reply. "And what part of it do you like best?" asked the good man. "Comin' home," was the prompt and truthful answer.

Harry, aged 5, had his photograph taken recently, and when the proof was sent home his mamma said he looked too solemn and asked him why he didn't smile. "I did smile, mamma," replied the little fellow, but I guess the man forgot to put it down."

"Mamma," asked little Willie, "did Daniel Webster build the dictionary?" No, dear; it was Noah; but why do you ask?" said his mother. "Why," replied the youngster, "our teacher said that Noah built the ark, and I thought he might have got Daniel to build the dictionary for him if he was busy."

Tommy, aged 5, and his cousin Willie, aged 6, had several little altercations, in which Tommy invariably got the worst of it. One day his mamma said to him: "Tommy, to-morrow is Willie's birthday; wouldn't you like to give him something?" "You just better believe I would," was the reply; "but, you see, he's bigger than I am and I can't."

Little 5-year-old Clara's papa had been away on a protracted business trip and her mamma was putting things in order and making sundry preparations for his return. Clara watched her closely for awhile and then observed: "Mamma, you make as much fuss as old Mr. Prodigal." "What do you mean, dear?" asked her mother. "I never heard of Mr. Prodigal." "Oh, yes, you did, mamma," was the reply. "Don't you know, the bible tells about what a fuss he made when his son came back?"



"A GLASS DARKLY."

(Romance from a New Year's Sermon.)

LIVE THOMPSON sat in her low cushioned seat in the little country church, paying strict attention to the New Year's sermon. It was her habit to pay strict attention to the regular Sunday sermon, but this Sunday being New Year day she was very devoted in her attention. Her eyes never wandered from the face of the preacher, the face that had been her Sunday study for thirty years. She was five years old when she began the study. The face had never grown any older to her. There were the same little semi-circular wrinkles under the lobe of the ear nearest her, which she had always seen, and the devious creases above the eyes continued always of the same elevation, except that they had grown towards, tending to the horizontal ripple above the nose, and deepening at that point.

The sermon, to the mind of Olive Thompson, was "more beautiful" on this particular day than had ever before.

"Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face," he said.



TAKE IT; IT IS GOOD.

"The mists of our present condition cloud our view; stormy days have sent dust and sleet against our windows until, for the dimness of our glass, we cannot see the sky."

Olive Thompson's eyes filled with tears. She remembered the "dust and sleet" of weary years. How the storm had breathed upon the windows of her soul, turning into frosted tablets what otherwise might have been avenues for sunlight.

"Take heart!" the preacher went on, "spring days are coming when the windows will be open to the sky, and we shall see face to face what has always been, but which we could not see for looking through a glass darkly."

A few months later Olive Thompson stood making apple pies in the pantry. The pantry window was up and the song of birds came in. Also there came in the voice of Joseph, the hired man, who was coaxing the new calf to drink. "Take it," he was saying to the inexperienced animal; "it is good."

"Take it; it is good," Olive repeated to herself in the pantry.

"What is good?" asked the old wrinkled mother knitting in the warm kitchen.

"Why, everything, I suppose," Olive answered, still listening with one ear to what Joseph was saying.

"It doesn't seem good now, bossy; but it is good, take it."

"Olive," said her mother, "it is time to wash the windows. The frost is all off and they look dingy."

"I know it," Olive said, "I will do it tomorrow."

In the morning she took her pan of suds and the polishing cloth and stood in a chair to wash the windows. She would begin in the kitchen, she thought, and go clear around to the parlor. She tried to pull out the old fashioned spring of the upper sash, but it would not yield.

"Olive," said her mother, "Joseph had better help to wash the windows. He can stand on the ladder on the outside." "Joseph," she called at the door, "come in and pull the spring for Olive." And, "Joseph, polish the glass on the outside, it is too hard for Olive."

Joseph was obedient. He had been "the hired man" for five years. No one would have known he was the hired man except the two women. He might have been the old lady's son and Olive's brother, so kind and true had he always been to these two.

Olive stood on a chair on the inside and Joseph on the ladder outside. The features of each were dim through the glass, and the two scrubbed away with soap and polish. What was left of smoke and frost yielded to double persuasion, and Joseph called from the outside: "Is it clear, Olive?"

"Olive, scrubbing closely, called back, pointing to the upper corner. "Just a little more rubbing right there."

She did not notice that Joseph was looking into her eyes, and thinking to himself "how clear" they were. He rubbed away at the filmy place, and then called again: "It isn't quite clear down that corner."

Olive polished away on her side catching Joseph's eye full of a light that shot right through the obscurity and made her remember the text of the New Year sermon—"Now we see through a glass darkly."

Around the house went the two, Olive on the inside and Joseph on the outside, and only the last parlor window was left. The morning had sped away like a glint of sunshine from the pan of water in the chair. Olive had watched this broken bit of radiance, as it played on the ceiling above the table with the album and pteridial Bible on it. It was like a halo above the precious spot. She moved her chair up to the window with a little sigh. Joseph moved his ladder up to the same window on the opposite side.

"Let it down from the top, Olive," he said.

"I can't," Olive called back, "it sticks."

Joseph was on her side in a moment. His fingers just touched hers as they pulled on the spring together, and something which was not unlike a glint of sunshine passed through the two. The spring slipped back and Joseph was on the outside again. Joseph lowered the window to bring it within easy reach of the woman on the other side. Strange he hadn't thought of that before. Standing straight up, Olive on her chair and Joseph on his ladder, the two looked into each other's eyes.

"IS IT CLEAR, OLIVE?"

Olive. There was nothing on Joseph's side and nothing on Olive's side to dim their vision. It was all clear.

"But now face to face," thought Olive.

The old mother passing by the parlor, smiled, and spoke not a word.

From the kitchen she called: "Are the windows all clean, daughter?"

"All clean, mother," came the answer, and Olive Thompson recalled the words of the sermon, "Take heart; spring days are coming when the windows will be open to the sky; and we shall see face to face what has always been."



When Autumn dies at last upon her throne Amid the ruin of a regal state, Boreas' clarion trumpets sound her fate,

And Winter knows the realm thenceforth his own; Calling his minions in the Arctic zone And making them through his own greatness great,

He journeys forth to his possessions straight. The winds' wild music aye before him blown,

A lock of frost he fastens on the land, And makes the air with keenest cold to sting;

The waters lie "neath fetters from his hand; And while his white snows toss and whirl and fling,

Robed royally and crowned for all command He proudly cries, "Behold me! I am King!"

—William Francis Barnard.

Christmas Eve.

By Mary N. Prescott. Christmas eve the wide world over, And Christmas chimes are sounding; Christmas trees their buds discover, With Christmas gifts abounding.

The moonbeams on the snow-drifts shed Strike out a sudden splendor; And all the heavenly fields are spread With starlight bright, yet tender.

The window-panes are white with frost, In tracery of flowers, Bringing again the summers lost To bloom through Christmas hours, O, happy night, whose blessed days Across the ages shine, Lighting the darkness of our days With promises divine!

Twelve Hundred Miles of 'Coral Reef.' The great barrier reef which fringes the coast of Australia north of Brisbane, in the direction of Torres Straits, must always rank among the wonders of the world. For 1,200 miles the coral animalcules have raised a solid protection against the rage of the ocean swell at a distance varying from 20 to 150 miles from the shore, leaving a comparatively safe and calm inner passage, suitable for navigation by the largest steamers on their voyage north and east. Sundry channels penetrate the reef at intervals, and whole fleets of trading schooners are regularly engaged amid the intricate labyrinth of coral inlets.—London Standard.

Idiot.

"The average American woman," said the tiresome boarder, "as any artist or any physician will tell you, is misshaped."

"Some of them," said the Choctaw

Idiot, "have matronly figures."—Ex.