

DIFFERING NEEDS.

The Story of a Tragic Happening.

A clock on the chimney-piece struck the half hour and Desmond, roused from his reverie by the fire, gave the logs a kick and walked over to his dressing table. His toilet only needed the addition of a dress coat to be quite complete, but as if still dissatisfied with his hair, which was sometimes refractory, he picked up his brushes and used them with unwonted vigor.

The face that looked back at him from the mirror was not reassuring. There were deep lines about the mouth and eyes, and a harassed expression, which did not well become the host of the evening—a man about to assist at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his marriage; he looked as if he were contemplating his own funeral. Throwing down the brushes he passed his hands over his face as if to smooth out the lines, and the muscles relaxing, gave him a less tense expression. He slipped on his coat and started toward the door, but suddenly changing his mind, flung himself into a chair before the fire. To leave the house that night was out of the question.

Downstairs he could hear the bustle of the final arrangements; the guests were coming at 9 o'clock. Madame was probably moving about putting a finishing touch here and there—and he did not like her touches; they were in-artistic.

Twenty five years they had been pulling along in double harness! At first they had kept step very well, pulling evenly and always together; it even outlasted the honeymoon and into the following year. Then gradually his pace quickened and hers lagged until they found themselves a tandem pair; he always leading. With a desire to give her a chance, he had tried to develop her along his own lines, but she neither understood nor was interested, preferring the conventional, narrow road on which she had always traveled. Safety and not experience was her value of life.

But Desmond, a league or two ahead of her, did not lack for companionship by the way, and at forty-five he found himself as desperately in love as a boy of twenty. After all, there was a good deal of the boy about him—a buoyant, trusting nature with a great capacity for affection that kept his heart young.

Since she had crept into his heart the whole world had taken on a different aspect. It was wonderful how she colored everything and readjusted his point of view. It was the strength of her personality, for sometimes, when he was away from her, and had not for several days seen her, he ceased to be reconciled to the inevitable, and longed to escape from his utter desolation, into the warmth of her love.

Then when he went to her she would give him fresh courage, sending him back into that stifling atmosphere to do his duty. Duty, forsooth! Was outward form everything to this mundane world? Sometimes he wondered how long he would prove so tractable, her influence dominating his whole character, forcing him to live his life apart from her. There were days when he was haunted by the fear that he saddened her life, but she would never have it so. Always, she said, he made her "glad, glad, glad," but once he noticed that her lip trembled. Ah, yes, he was in love, and he loved the being loved, as she loved him!

Desmond took a crumpled bit of paper out of his pocket and smoothed it on his knee. "Come at 9," it read; "there is rather an important matter about which you can help me." There was no signature, and the lines were penciled hurriedly and addressed to his club. Since he had received the note

Desmond had thought of nothing else, Doris needed him, had sent for him, and he could not move, though he would go to the ends of the earth for her.

It was scarcely to be expected that she would keep track of his family celebrations, neither could a man with any decency fail to put in an appearance at his wedding anniversary. The grim mockery of it all was horrible! "An important matter." What could it be? The lines on Desmond's face deepened into furrows as his thoughts took a perplexed turn, and he started slightly as the clock chimed out the hour of 9.

Oh, to be with her now! No one had ever so stimulated him and appealed to his better nature, for she was too fine to care for the weaker part. But she was human, too, in spite of her theories, and loved him in spite of herself. And she was high minded and tolerant to a degree unusual in so young a woman.

There was a knock at the door and a voice speaking quietly. "Mrs. Desmond says, sir, you will please join her in the drawing-room."

Desmond rose from his seat and tossed the note into the fire, pulling himself together like a person in a dream. If the miserable farce must be gone through with he would at least play his part like a man. What if, instead of assuming a role, he were to go down to the drawing-room, proclaim the truth and beg for freedom! He loathed hypocrisy and deceit, but should he wipe them out of his life at the cost of his wife's contentment? She did not love him, he knew, not as he understood love—it was not necessary or comprehensible to her nature—but she took much pleasure in being his wife, and she lived according to her lights, which burned with steady dimness. Assuredly he could not cry out like a caged beast. Was he a child that he clamored so for the truth? Bah! Not one man in a thousand shows an honest front to the world!

On the landing of the stairs Desmond stopped, and picking a few sprays of lilies of the valley from a jar which stood there, thrust them into the lapel of his coat. The fragrance reminded him of his brave little girl, and he descended to the drawing-room with a determination to smile blandly on his guests, even though he hated them for keeping him from the woman he loved.

He drew aside the portiere—the comedy was about to begin. Enter the model husband. Congratulations are the order of the day.

Two hours later Desmond glanced about the crowded rooms and indulged in a moment of self-congratulation. He had played his part with considerable effort, but he knew what was required of him in his own house. The success of the reception pleased his pride; his wife was a delightful hostess—people were saying that on every side; he wondered why they did not entertain more often.

He moved about from one group to another, and cast a pitying glance at his wife, whom the continuous flow of people had kept riveted in the place where she was receiving. Why not get her away for a bit and break up the incessant "how d'ye do—so glad—charmed," that threatened to become automatic? The conservatory and an ice would be his suggestion to any other woman. Gad, the heat was intense, now he thought of it.

Desmond made his way through the room, his zigzag path paved with good intentions, but one of the guests had forestalled him, and he saw the hostess smile gratefully up at Jim Ferris, and slipping her arm through his, pass out through the hall that led to the conservatory.

Relieved of the duty that lay nearest to him, Desmond forgot his cue for a moment, and his thoughts rebelliously went back to the little girl who made

his life. The Hungarian band was playing a wild, fantastic thing that wailed and pulsated above the murmur of the crowd, and stirred the man who was listening. To his acute consciousness it seemed as if it were a cry from the woman he loved—his little Bohemian girl she was; how the name suited her.

Suddenly there was a shriek that rang above the orchestra, paralyzing the musicians so that their instruments dropped of one accord. With a great stride Desmond crossed the hall and entered the conservatory, where already a crowd had gathered. Silently they made way for their host to pass, and in another moment he faced the full horror of the situation.

A woman lay upon the floor struggling to get away from the grasp of the men who held her down, while Jim Ferris was wrapping rugs about her in a vain endeavor to stifle the flames which were devouring her. In a perfect frenzy of agony the woman wrenched herself from the men and made an attempt to get upon her feet, the singed rugs falling from her, but in a second Ferris had torn a heavy covering from a divan, and, wrapping it about her, had thrown her to the floor. In the brief glimpse of her as she had risen Desmond recognized his wife.

He dropped on the floor beside her and tried to speak, but the words were incoherent, and she seemed not to heed them. Once she looked toward him, but she passed him by, and her eyes sought out Ferris from among the group about her. "Send them away," she moaned, feebly. Quietly the guests moved off and took their departure. A great hush fell over the brilliantly lighted house.

In the conservatory only Desmond and Ferris watched beside the suffering woman. Would a doctor never come? In the intensity of her pain she made frantic efforts to break away from them, but they held her fast. For a moment or two Ferris' voice quieted her, and he spoke gently, as to a little child.

"Can you be brave and have patience, little woman? It will not last long like this."

She lifted her head. "My dear old Jim—dear, faithful Jim—not very long. Raise me up a little."

Both men lifted her head from the cushion which had been put under it, but it was on Ferris that she leaned. Her neck and face, which the flames had not touched, gleamed in ghastly contrast against the black of Ferris's coat.

Desmond spoke in a low, tense whisper: "Give her to me. She is mine, Ferris."

At the sound of his voice Mrs. Desmond turned her eyes on him with a puzzled expression, as if suddenly becoming aware of his presence. Then she gave a loud cry and dropped back unconscious in Jim Ferris's arms.

Two servants and a distinguished looking man entered the conservatory. The doctor knelt down and felt the woman's pulse, then he put his ear to her heart. The little group waited in breathless silence. On the forehead of Ferris, who still held her, great drops of sweat were forming.

From a case at his side the doctor took a tiny phial and poured a few liquid drops down the woman's throat. As he parted her lips to administer the dose, her jaw fell helplessly. "Carry her upstairs," he said.

Tenderly Ferris took her in his arms, and Desmond led the way to her chamber. On the bed she was gently laid, and then the doctor spoke again:

"Go downstairs and wait until I come. You can do nothing here. Send me two of your women, Mr. Desmond."

Both men left the room and descended to the library, where Ferris dropped into a chair and Desmond went on to carry out the doctor's orders. When he returned he closed the door softly

behind him, and, going over to the fireplace, leaned his arm on the mantel, heavily.

Ferris rose from his seat and walked over to where the other man stood. "Shall I tell you how it happened?" he said.

"Yes."

"We were sitting in the conservatory. Through the palms back of us some one was smoking. Presently we ceased to smell the cigar, but it must have been thrown on the floor just behind her skirts. She was very tired, and was thankful to linger on after her ice was finished. Then she spoke of a curious odor. Suddenly she jumped to her feet—and the rest you know."

"God help her!" Desmond's head sank in his arms on the chimney-piece. Suddenly he turned about and faced Ferris. An angry flush mounted to his face.

"Why did you usurp my place to-night? You held her and carried her, and saved her life, if it can be saved. She appealed to you, too. Am I not her husband?"

The veins in Ferris's forehead swelled to whipcords at the insolence of Desmond's tone, but he clenched his teeth and made a strong effort at self control. When he spoke his voice was quiet.

"Desmond, we have been friends many years, but first I came here as Lola's friend, do you remember that?"

"I had forgotten—it is so long ago."

"Yes. You took me into your family life quite naturally, and I was grateful—grateful enough never to forget the footing on which I stood."

"What do you mean?"

"That for twenty years I have been one of you—welcomed always—free to come and go as I chose—a privilege a lonely man in the world appreciates."

"Well!"

"Well, there was a time long ago, before you knew Lola, when she and I were children together—little sweethearts. We were to grow up and be married—it was the limit of our imagination. Then when I was fifteen I was sent to the ranch in Texas; three years after, Lola came out and married you in her first season. It was all very natural." Desmond could feel the pain in the quiet, even voice. "When I came back I was a man, and I meant to live like a man. The life down there toughens a fellow's heart as well as his muscle. So I looked you up and liked you, first because Lola did," he said simply, "and then for yourself."

"Thank you, Ferris." Desmond opened the library door and stood in the hall listening intently, but there was no sound from the floor above. How long, he wondered, would this awful suspense last!

"Shall I go on?" he said.

Desmond came back to the fire. "It doesn't matter, old man," he said wearily. "I think I understand; but it comes with a sudden shock."

"But it does matter, Desmond. You have a right to know. All these years I have gone on loving Lola, but in a different way. It satisfied me entirely to be about and fill the place I did in her life. You cannot understand that, for your temperament is different."

"Is it?"

"And I could scarcely be about so much without observing the change that has come over you."

"So you have been studying me, Ferris? I scarcely think I am worth it!" An ominous look came into Desmond's eyes.

"Wait, Desmond! When you married Lola you were both mere children. It was in the nature of things that, having character, you should develop, but your development, from contact with the world, was more rapid and broad. Lola reached her limitations, but you went on—then she failed to satisfy you."

"How do you know this?"

"From my knowledge of human na-