

A BABY'S VOICE.

It is an admitted fact that in the matter of self-sale and barter most women can be wicked very gracefully. Having received through Hymen, agent, the awards of Mammon, they smile and wear good clothes, and only a few die of broken hearts, while none is so registered in their burial certificates. But, once in a while, with all good intention to be gracefully, contentedly and smilingly wicked, some woman breaks down in her role.

Such a catastrophe overtook Corinne Jamison in the fifth year of her married life. She had gone into it with her eyes wide open and she had meant to march on bravely to the end. She had detested old Sergius Jamison from the first time she knew that he had pitted his gold against her beauty and birth and poverty, and she had fairly loathed him when he took her hand at the altar to slip thereon the little link that was to chafe and fret and weigh down until it was more galling and heavy than a hundred weight of iron chains.

But—she had married him, and on his part he had paid royally all that she had asked. He had dressed her like a queen; her home was the most elegant in a city of elegant homes; her servants were numerous and well-trained; her carriages and horses beyond criticism. He had given her brother Herbert his course at Harvard and sent Jenne to Paris to Marchesi where Jenne had basely turned her back on Song and wedded an English lord, a proceeding of which her generous brother-in-law highly approved, and testified thereunto substantially by the magnificence of her trousseau.

Thinking over all these things it almost seemed as if he had done enough to be forgiven being—himself. What if he did say "I seen" and pick his teeth at table in an emphatic way and advertise loudly that he was taking soup; what if his entire conversation was one of unending recital of what he had and how he had made it; what if his jokes were coarse and his anecdotes vulgar and his caresses after wine were nauseating in their lewdness? He had paid and paid royally, nobody could deny.

But there was something on her side, too, she thought; she, too, had paid. The boy, four years old now—he had squared accounts; it was in the hope of such compensation that the man had made the bargain. She knew that, and he had had his desire granted. There was an heir to all the wealth of Sergius Jamison; a son whose every feature duplicated his father; a son who, at four years old, fairly revelled in display and who bid fair to spend his father's millions in no quiet fashion. There had been very little of the mother feeling in the birth of her son; she had felt crushed under the humiliation of the terms of her sale and had feverishly yearned to balance the ledger of obligation; through months she had agonized lest the child be not a son and her joy in his advent was only the joy of a woman who had cancelled a debt. Of the spontaneous maternal love, which even a mare displays toward her colt or a lioness toward her whelps, she had felt not a throb toward the boy. He was his father incarnate and the atmosphere of the father that enveloped the child repelled the affection that the ordinary mother would have felt in spite of environments.

With the sense of the debt almost, if not entirely paid, she had lost her hold on her role; it had been harder every year to wear her clothes smilingly and gracefully to carry her chains. When the little girl had come, eighteen months before, she had gathered her to her heart in a passionate outburst of mother love, deep enough and strong enough to bring, for a time, forgetfulness of the father. But after that it

had seemed a crucifixion to be a wife, even in a mask.

She had lost her power of gracious subservience to his moods; she had even let him see the contempt she felt for his braggadocio and he had let her, in turn, feel the iron hand of ownership. Detecting her passion for the one child and her indifference towards the other he had lost no opportunity of hurting her pride and mother-love by disparaging and neglecting the one while heaping benefits upon the other; and so it had gone on daily for eighteen months, until now the woman had let slip from her grasp every vestige of power to hold her part in the drama.

So she had thought it all over and brought herself up to the pitch of resolution: "God required no more than one could stand," she thought, "and if it got to the place where the Eternal Beyond had less terror than the Certain Present, then God knew that the limit was reached and would be merciful accordingly. She could not go on in this way any longer; she could not even be a make believe wife and she would not be the mother of any more of Sergius Jamison's children. She had given value received for the price he had paid and now they were quits. As to the children, it was not like she was a mother that was needed; there was money enough to buy every care that was necessary. In the matter of mother-love the little girl was young enough soon to get over missing it and the boy—for the first something like mother-love for him wrenched her heartstrings into a vibration of pain; well," bitterly, "he had never known it to miss; she had made up her mind; after all, it was not hard, and—" here she actually smiled—"was it not a most fitting finale that one who had sold herself, a slave in Hymen's mart, should choose coward's death?"

Then she went about her preparations very calmly, as calmly, she recollected, as when she had robed herself for her bridal five years before. There should be no scandal to reflect upon the children in after years; a convenient neuralgia, an overdose of morphine, a shocking accident, a gorgeous funeral and it was all over. And so she was almost deferential to her husband at dinner, where a number of guests were assembled, and but for a neuralgic headache, which increased as the evening wore on, would have been in higher spirits than her husband had ever seen her. The headache at last was the palpable cause of her early withdrawal from her guests, protesting that the pain was nothing serious and would disappear by morning. She would not trust herself, as was her nightly custom, to go through the baby's nursery, which opened into her own room and whose door was always ajar, but walked straight into her own apartment, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples, whose simulated ache had grown into a real agony of pain. She disrobed mechanically and shook the white powder into the glass and turned toward the carafe for water. A rustling behind her made her pause and look around. There framed in the curtains of the doorway, in her little, white gown, with her eyes heavy with sleep and her red lips all a-tremble, stood her baby-girl. "Mudder," she said, "Baby wants mudder."

The woman put down the carafe and tumbler and kneeling down, in a passion of tears, caught up the little creature and rocked her on her bosom. "You shall have mother, too," she sobbed and whispered; "we will go together, you and I."

In that moment she knew that she could not leave the child; that nothing, nothing, was or ever could be so much to her as the clinging arms of the baby that "wanted mother," and so, without faltering in her resolution, as regarded herself, she reached out further to add

to the crime against herself that one of all others at which mankind turns sick and which we call Murder.

"Yes," she thought, as she moved backward and forward with the gold of the child's hair catching the light of the gas, "they would go together; it didn't matter if there was a scandal; the boy would not suffer, being a boy, and she could never go, now, out into that alluring Beyond with her baby's cry in her ears. She could not be at peace, even in paradise, without her

baby." And then, as she held her and kissed the little rosy palms, there came back to her mind something that repeated and repeated itself over and over again, something about the "Pure in heart shall see God." "You will, my little one," she whispered over the golden head, and then a great horror came upon her. What if they did "go together" and the pure was separated from the impure, and her arms were loosened and the child was taken away where purity might bask in the presence



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