

## THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

## HOW IT LURED A MAN.

The Inspector looked up impatiently. A succession of charges at the police station that evening had tired him, and he had sat down by the fire in his room to rest. Now, a minute afterwards, he heard a knock at the door.

"Well, what is it?" he said, as a constable entered. "Another drunk?"

"No, sir," replied the constable. "A gentleman wants to see you unofficially." "Unofficially? Why, it is long past midnight."

"Yes, sir. This is his card."

The Inspector read the card. Both name and address were familiar to him. The name was that of a novelist of considerable reputation. The address was a square near the police station.

"I will see the gentleman," he said.

"Very well, sir."

The constable withdrew, ushered into the room a tall, thin man, and again withdrew. From the photographs he had seen, the Inspector recognized his visitor to be the Novelist.

"Good evening. Please sit down," he said.

The Novelist bowed, and sat in a chair at the opposite side of the table. The Inspector noticed that, in spite of the coldness of the weather, he wore neither overcoat nor gloves.

"Won't you come nearer the fire?" he asked.

"Thank you, no," replied the Novelist speaking quickly and nervously. "I have been hurrying, and am hot. I apologize for calling at such a time. It is very good of you to see me. I want you to give me an opinion."

"An opinion?"

"Ah! I must explain. You know that I write novels?"

"Yes."

"I am writing one now. Circumstances in it suggest a problem in law, on which I want you to give an opinion. Will you? I would have gone to a solicitor had it not been so late. Will you, at any rate listen to the circumstances?"

While the Novelist was speaking, the Inspector had looked at him intently, as if curious of something in his appearance. Now he looked away from him as if satisfied.

"Yes," he replied, "I will listen. But excuse me a minute; I have an order for my men."

He went from the room into the outer office, spoke to one of the two constables on duty there, and returned.

"Now," he said, as he sat down, "I am at your service."

For a time the Novelist was silent. Then he leaned forward and said—

"The circumstances will suggest the problem. They are the story of my novel. I will tell it to you. It is the story of a man and a woman. A strange story!"

"They met for the first time years ago, when both were young. She was beautiful to see, and he was clever. He admired her, and she—yes, maybe she admired him. They talked, and he arranged to talk again."

"The first time and the times which came next, he admired her. Afterwards she loved her. I am telling you the story briefly. In the writing I have told it at length. The eyes and the hair of the woman, the words she said, the dresses she wore—they are all set down. Ah! and the thoughts of the man."

"He loved her, but she did not love him. Yet, when he asked her to marry him, she said 'Yes.' She should have said 'No.' He asked earnestly. In pity she should have said 'No.'"

"Why did she say 'Yes?' That is also set down. He was clever, and—yes, maybe she admired him. He was rich, and he was beginning to be famous

Riches and fame! Reasons sufficient! She bowed her head, and whispered the word. Sweetly it sounded.

"The thoughts of the man? Joy and wonder at the present. Dreams of the future. Happiness—long happiness. A life like that of heaven. The thoughts of those who love and are beloved."

"He was glad, but his mother wept. She had looked into the eyes of the woman, and had learned the truth. She knew why the word had been 'Yes.' She knew that his life would be like that of hell, not that of heaven."

"In the writing there is a short, sad scene between him and her. She prayed him not to marry the woman. He replied angrily. She told him what she knew. He replied yet more angrily. She bade him choose her or the woman. He scorned her, and went to the woman."

The Novelist paused, and rested his head on his hands. The Inspector watched him gravely.

"They were married," said the Novelist, lifting his head. "A fair June day. The music of the church bells, the solemn promises, again the music of the church bells. They were married. 'Till death do us part,' said the priest. 'Till death do us part,' they repeated."

"Do you remember the old fairy-tale ending, 'and were happy ever after?' These two were happy for a little time. The woman shared in the riches and the fame, and was content. The man still loved, and still believed that she loved."

"For a little time, and then he doubted. Something she had said or done had vexed his dream. He doubted. The life like heaven ended, and the life like hell commenced."

"There are few who dare to study a soul. To watch and to listen, to remember and to judge; horror and horror! Yet in that way is truth to be found. In that way, and no other."

"To convince himself that he was wrong to doubt, the man began to study the soul of the woman. Soon he knew that he was right, not wrong. Then should he have ceased to study, for so would he have suffered sorrow only."

"But he continued. Day after day he watched and listened, remembered and judged. Much he learned. Evil and ugly was her soul. No kindness had it for him or any man or woman. For itself alone it lived. You understand? Her soul was to him a book; each event of its life a page."

"Can love change to hate? Ay, it can. I who speak know. And the hate which has been love is more terrible far than hate which has not. I who speak know. Ay, and I have written it plainly."

Again the Novelist paused. Sweat-drops were on his forehead; his fingers were locked together. The Inspector glanced at the clock, and then again watched him gravely.

"The man hated her," said the Novelist. "But the study of her soul fascinated him, and, that it might not end he hid the hate. There were two, the woman and the soul within the woman. The one he hated because of the other, and yet endured because of the other."

"Woe is it when the husband wears of the wife or the wife of the husband. Only death can give release. Weariness, weariness, and weariness! 'Till death do us part—till death do us part.'"

"The man hid the hate. But its effects on his mind he could not hide. The woman noticed that he was ever sad and dull. Do you know what such women do when they notice this in their husbands? They neither sorrow nor sympathize. They smile, and turn away."

"It was to a friend of the man, his greatest friend, that the woman turned. First she strove to make him love her. She succeeded soon, for her eyes and voice had strange compelling power. Then she strove to make him confess

his love. But now honor made him resist, and again and again she failed.

"The man continued to watch and to listen, to remember and to judge. From the first he knew for what she strove and why. Love, good or bad, for his friend was not her motive. She but wished to fill the hours, and to triumph and laugh."

"Every day her soul grew more evil and ugly. Every day his hate increased. At times it fretted for expression, but always he hid it from her. Still there seemed few things to learn. Still the study of her soul fascinated him."

The Inspector again glanced at the clock.

"I weary you," said the Novelist. "Yet listen a little longer. Hear the end of the story. Give me your opinion."

"The man, his friend, and the woman. You understand? The man sad and dull, the hate fretting within him. His friend hesitating between honor and love. The woman in wickedness smiling and whispering."

"So for many days. Then a day of change."

"On the evening of the day, the man sat alone in a room of his house. The woman and his friend were at a theatre together, and he waited their return."

"Often latterly he had sat alone while they were together elsewhere. The woman wooed boldly, and neither hate for her nor pity for his friend moved him to intervene. Still, the study of her soul fascinated him."

"On this evening, as on the others, he could think only of the fight that was being fought. Which would prevail? The eyes and the voice of the woman, or the honor of his friend? The woman or his friend?"

"It was nearly midnight when they returned. He heard them say good-bye, heard his friend drive away, and heard the woman ascending the staircase. Presently he would know whether once more she had failed, or whether at last she had succeeded."

"She entered the room, greeted him, and threw herself upon a couch. Laughter and triumph were in her eyes and voice."

"He rose, and stood by the couch. She talked idly of the theatre and the play. He listened to her words, and gazed at her face. The hate raged fiercely."

"He knew that she had succeeded. He knew that she had tempted his friend more cunningly than before. He knew that his friend had forsaken honor for love. Her soul told him all."

"Had she looked up she must have seen the hate. It choked his throat; it shook his hands and lips. You understand? The fascination of the study of her soul had passed. The hate was free from restraint."

"There was no need to study more. He knew her soul at last, wholly, absolutely. Evil and ugly it was, beyond all power of increase; monstrously evil and ugly. There could be no new thing to learn."

"The woman did not look up, and did not see the hate. Conscious only of the laughter and triumph, she lay on the couch and talked. For a time the words were idle, but then they were filled with purpose."

"To add to the laughter and triumph she mocked the man. She had remembered him lovingly during the evening, she said. She had pitied him, sitting alone, writing, writing. She had wished that he, and not his friend, had been with her."

"It was then, and only then, that he thought of the vengeance. It was then that he stretched out his hand to the knife that lay upon the table. It was then, while she mocked him, not knowing he understood, that the hate bade him kill."

"She continued to talk. But now her

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