

# The Story of an Hour.

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AND this is the end of it all!

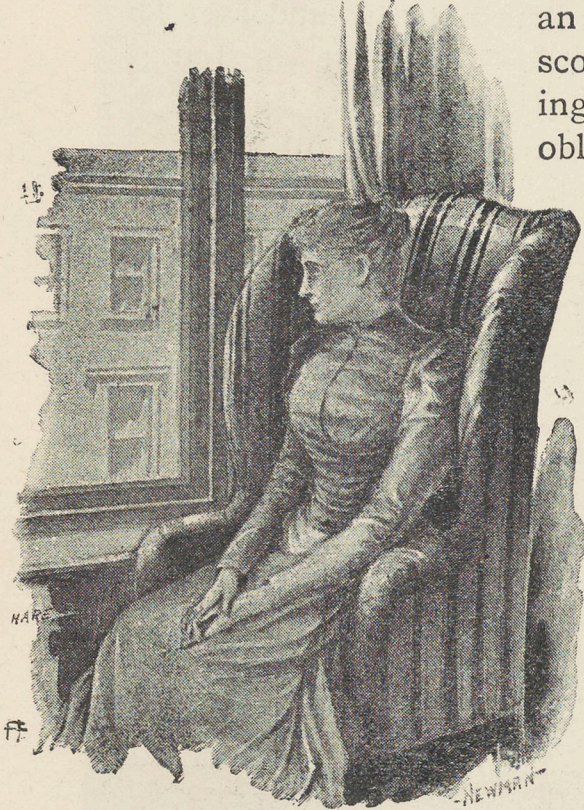
The sharp queries and sullen answers, the sobs, tears, and bickerings are over, and in their stead reigns the cold silence of resolution.

How did it all begin? Neither could tell. Yet the torture of an unworthy suspicion, and a pride that scorns to answer the doubts of an exacting love, have apparently sufficed to obliterate the memory of the happiness of three unclouded years of kindness and love.

They are going to separate. There is nothing else to do, She says, and He tacitly agrees, for he knows it is impossible to go on living in this atmosphere of discontent. And they calmly arrange their affairs, as though it were merely a question of a few weeks' absence, instead of the breaking up of their home. He will travel, and She will stay on at their house a little longer, till her mother goes abroad, when she will join her, dismissing all the servants, excepting the old nurse who looks after their

child. Ah! it is the thought of their child that makes the separation so hard, and He feels that the last link between them is broken, when he yields that little life into the hands of the wife who does not trust him, thinking bitterly in his heart that he may be taught to hate him.

She sits in the drawing-room, idly looking out of the window, surprised at the dead calm that seems to have come over the



"IDLY LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW."

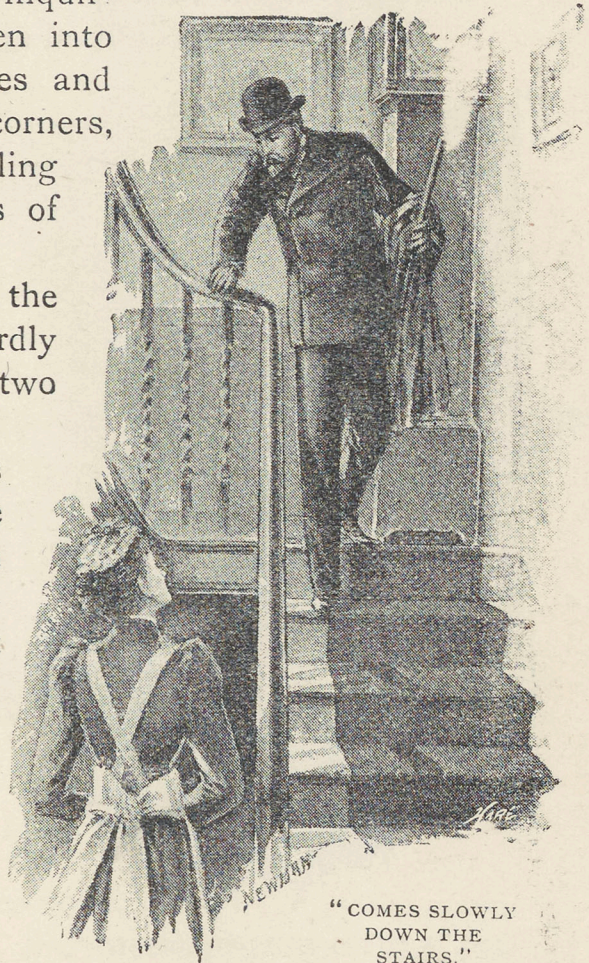
house. An organ is playing in the street, and the notes jar on her strained nerves till she could scream ; but she sits still with her hands in her lap, trying to believe that she is utterly indifferent to present, past, or future, yet unconsciously listening to the hurried, heavy footsteps overhead, where her husband is packing his portmanteau. She is quite anxious for a moment as she remembers she has put away his fur-lined coat that might be useful if he goes travelling in chilly regions, but she recollects herself with a start, and does not stir from her seat. She lets the bitter thoughts come uppermost in her heart now, for she is convinced, of course, that this parting is the best thing that could take place. Upstairs He, quite helpless as to the locality of many necessaries that have hitherto been prepared for him by thoughtful hands, and not feeling able to confront his servant's inquiring eyes, is savagely thrusting linen into an unwilling receptacle, whence ties and collars stick out provokingly at odd corners, and trying to subdue a queer feeling that oppresses him when he thinks of her stony indifference.

So the packing goes on, and the organ grinds merrily, and is inwardly but emphatically cursed by at least two ungrateful people.

At last He is ready, and comes slowly down the stairs, giving some very audible and offhand orders in the hall respecting his particular belongings. A close observer might notice that he speaks and laughs a little too readily. The little, pale woman, sitting motionless in the room, hears him, and in her heart of hearts hears what he strives to hide.

After all, it is a great wrench for a man to leave his—well, then, whose fault is it? And the old arguments and suspicions rise again in her mind and deaden all other feelings.

He comes into the drawing-room, hat in hand, very firm and very calm. She does not move.



"COMES SLOWLY  
DOWN THE  
STAIRS."

“Good-bye,” he says, holding out his hand.

“Good-bye,” she answers, taking it mechanically.

He pauses at the door, and their eyes meet. “It is much better so,” she says, faintly. And he is gone.

Then there is a rushing and singing in her ears. The notes of the organ rise louder and louder, till they swell into a rich anthem—the garish daylight changes to the dim light of a church—she walks up the aisle in a glistening white dress, on which pearldrops shake and tremble. She hears a dim murmur of voices and rustling of garments, and the scent of white flowers is heavy in the air. There rises a clear voice, whose fervour moves her inmost heart, exhorting her to love, honour and obey—and out of the fulness of her soul she promises. *Oh! God, oh! God, she meant to keep that promise.*

Then comes a confused din of voices and rolling of carriages, but she is only conscious of the strong arm to which she clings, and the dear face that bends so tenderly over hers.

With a little sobbing gasp she opens her eyes. Has she been asleep? No, but the organ has stopped and is rumbling down the street, followed by a crowd of small boys and girls, whose ears are not sensitive to the quality of music.

She rises. Her knees are shaking as she drags herself painfully across the room, catching a glimpse of a white, wild-looking face in the tall pier-glass as she clutches the handle of the door, and then the sight of the empty hat-rack in the hall, the absence of coat and stick, or fragrant whiff of cigar, bring the irrevocableness of the parting home to her more vividly than anything—

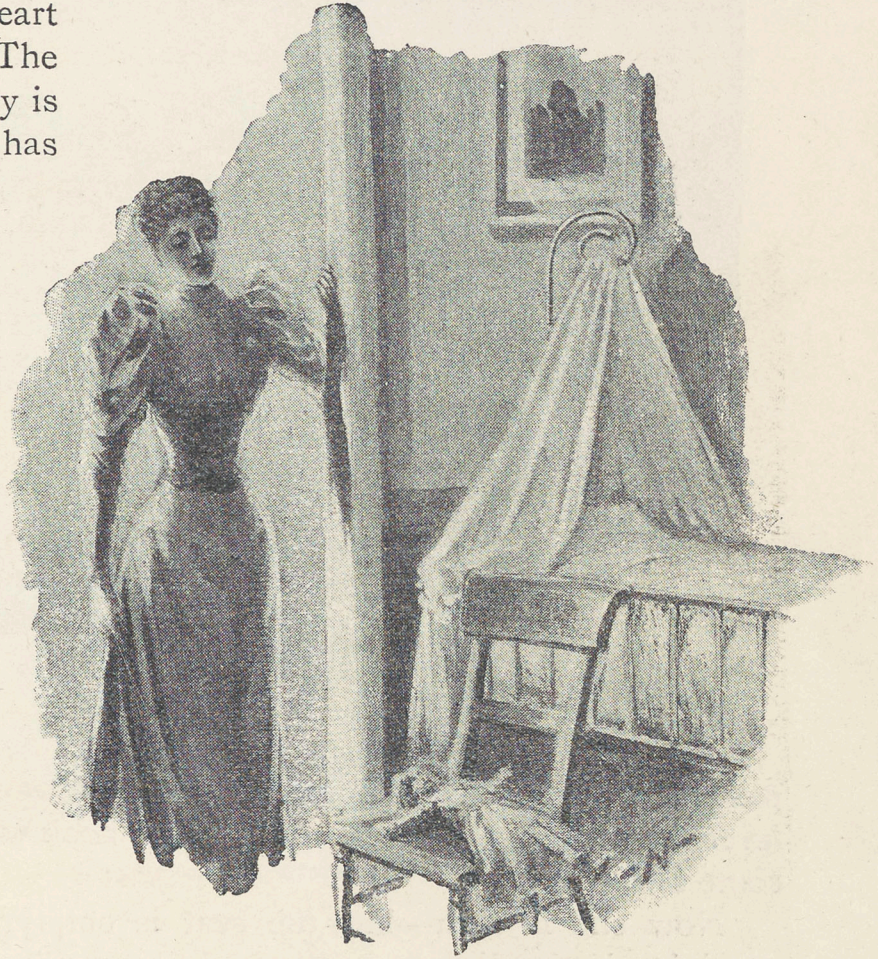
more than the few words of farewell, the cold handshake, and the slam of the hall door half-an-hour ago. “Was it only half-an-hour?” she murmurs, staring stupidly at the clock; “it seems an eternity! And now he is going farther and farther from me,



“A WHITE, WILD-LOOKING FACE.”

never to return—never to tease, and praise and love me, for (she sobs) he did love me once, in spite of everything—never to laugh at me and call me ‘little woman’—never to hold my hand or ask my help again! He is thinking of his wasted life and love; yes, he will believe he has wasted it on *me*. He is thinking of our little child—he did not bid him good-bye—how could he bear to?” Ah! there is still something left for her to love; but what is left for him? And with bitter tears she remembers how quietly he gave the child up to her, and how she accepted the sacrifice as a matter of course, though she knew what it cost him.

With beating heart she goes upstairs. The cosy, pretty nursery is empty. The nurse has taken the child to Kensington Gardens as usual. She passes on into their bedroom. It is still in disorder, and she has not the heart to put it straight, though she feels that a little occupation would do her good. The sun shines warmly into the room, but she shivers.



“THE NURSERY IS EMPTY.”

There is nothing but loneliness in the house, and that she cannot bear, for it brings thoughts, and she dares not think.

Hardly knowing what she does, she finds and puts on her hat and gloves, and turns to go, but, at the very threshold, she stumbles over something—why, it is the little silver match-box he always uses—and loses. She must take it to him—then she remembers, and, oh! strange woman, covers it with tears and kisses. She hurries down the stairs, and out of the house, and a

long way down the street before she knows that she is hurrying, because she cannot bear to be alone. An awful feeling of restlessness, of reproach, will not let her be still, and yet she was so calm a little while ago.

On—on—regardless of curious looks, for her cheeks are tear-stained, and now and then there is a little catch in her breath, that she cannot repress.

On—past the quaint old red brick palace, whose history they read together, past the pond with its toy navy and anxious captains,



"THE POND AND ITS TOY NAVY."

past nursemaids, children, and mooning philosophers she hurries, feverishly longing to reach the chosen nook where a joyous welcome awaits her.

Now she is near—but the seat is empty, and the nurse is gossiping in the distance. She runs on angrily—and stops! For, under a sheltering tree, He stands bidding their little child good-bye. She can hear his gentle words, and the soft, cooing answers, and she dumbly stretches out her arms, as a great wave of love surges in her heart and drowns the bitter thoughts for ever. In a little while he will go, and then this tide of love and repentance will have come too late.

She calls him faintly—and he turns. Her hat is awry, her hair coming down, and she has torn her pretty dress on some pro-

jecting branch, yet He thinks she never looked more beautiful, as he answers the mute appeal of those tearful eyes, and takes her in his arms. Deep silence reigns. Then, from the depths of a penitent heart, she sobs out loving, passionate words: "Forgive me—my husband!"



"FORGIVE ME—MY HUSBAND!"