

Mrs. Frane, his son's friend and helper, and the wife of the man he had promised to ruin by a trumped-up lie. Medlow was not a radically bad man, but by environment and circumstance in the beginning he had been forced into crooked ways, and living by his wits, he had worked his way through life by many devious paths. The one pure influence in his life was his little crippled son, whom he adored, and ever since the child was born, he had, to use his own expression, "run straight."

But, unfortunately, his master Tarne had become aware of a dishonest episode in the man's life, for which he had not paid the penalty by law, and held the threat of exposure over him. Fear of gaol, and disgrace in the eyes of his child, who loved and admired him immensely, terrified Medlow. So he sat on by the boy's bedside thinking—thinking—thinking—"Through fire and water" he had vowed to go to repay his child's benefactor, and now he felt he was called upon to face far worse, the contempt and reproach of his son when he had grown old enough to understand.

Finally he rose with a sigh, kissed his boy silently and went away. He had a bitter battle to fight, and the issue was by no means certain.

IMMEDIATELY on Lester Frane's discharge from hospital, he found himself under arrest on a charge of robbery and assault. He was too weak physically, and dazed mentally, to make any protest, knowing the uselessness of such a course, and he submitted apathetically enough.

Stella, who had not visited the hospital for several days on account of a heavy cold she had contracted, appeared there an hour or two after her husband's arrest, which had taken place in the hospital grounds, under the eyes of the indignant nurses.

"Didn't even wait till he got out of the grounds," said the warm-hearted hot-tempered charge nurse. "Well, if Mr. Frane's a bad man, then I'll believe it of any one."

Stella stood as if turned to stone, and the nurse, a warm partisan on whatever side she championed, and who had inclined to the belief that there must be "something" to account for her favourite patient's refusal to see his wife, now felt her heart melt in pity for the stricken girl, with her white face and tragic eyes.

But Stella was in no mood for sympathy. She was in a white heat of rage that Godfrey Tarne should dare to do this thing—should brand her husband a thief and midnight assassin. Her own belief wavered strangely. At times the very suggestion of Lester Frane being a thief was incredible, and she rejected it with scorn. Then would come the thought of his extremity of trouble and the damning evidence against him to breed doubts. But, innocent or guilty, she was resolved to save him, even though it might shame her forever in the eyes of the world.

She hastened away now to make arrangements for Lester's release on bail, only to find that a bondsman had already come forward and her husband was free. She knew the bondsman—John Graham, a friend of Lester's father, a dour old Scotchman of narrow views and rigid principles. He was one of Frane's few personal friends, and thought highly of the younger man, but Stella knew that he looked upon Lester's wife and her public career with disapproving eyes. She felt that indirectly he blamed her for Lester's business failure, and if he even had an inkling of the facts he would certainly hold her responsible for her husband's present situation.

OLD John Graham received her at his office civilly enough, but with a frosty stare through his horn-rimmed glasses. He said he had been glad to become Lester's surety, but refused point blank to shift his responsibility to herself.

"A good steady lad," he said, "and no more a thief than I am."

"Of course not," said Stella, the tears rushing to her eyes, and heartened by the confidence in his tones. "And now please may I see Lester?"

Graham shook his head. It seemed that Frane, still very weak from his illness, was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the doctor had ordered him complete rest, and he himself had begged that he might see *no one*. The emphasis on that word made Stella's heart sink.

"But—but—I am his wife," she faltered.

If a slight trace of pity softened the hard grey eyes behind the convex glasses Stella did not see it; she only heard the cold finality of the tones which said:

"Better not. Lester seemed over-agitated at the mention of your name, and expressed no wish to see you. You might write, though—"

"I'll not write," said the girl proudly, and went out with her head held high. She was hurt and bewildered, her pride cut to the quick. What was there to explain her husband's persistent avoidance of her, except a bitter resentment for her share in that dreadful night's work, or else—the *knowledge of his guilt* and the shame of a thief.

Stella went home to bed, feeling ill and exhausted, and for some time was unable to leave it, a sharp nervous illness following on her heavy cold. She saw no one, cancelled all public engagements, and denied all private friends. Twice she heard from Tarne in letters which alternately implored and threatened, but she ignored them both. From Frane she heard not at all, and made no attempt to communicate with him; but John Graham, according to promise, wrote curtly, informing her of the date of the trial, that Lester was stronger, and a good lawyer had been engaged for him.

Ill or well, Stella was resolved to appear at the trial, and looking like the ghost of her former self, with delicately-hollowed cheeks unnaturally flushed, and fever-bright eyes, she came out to her waiting car on the eventful morning, defying her doctor's grave warning.

"A fresh chill might mean the permanent loss of your voice," he had said, employing the strongest argument he could think of; but Stella had replied listlessly:

"And if it does—is that such a great matter?" she said bitterly to herself.

WHEN Stella reached the Court it was packed with the idly-curious public, and she took her seat in the body of the hall inconspicuously, from which position she could plainly see her husband and also his accuser.

The sight of Lester in the prisoner's dock wrung her heart with indignation and compassion. Her big handsome husband, how thin and worn he looked, with the dark shadows of illness and sleeplessness beneath his fine steady eyes, but he held his head as high as ever, with its old free carriage of pride and independence.

From him Stella stole a glance at Godfrey Tarne, seemingly as imperturbable and well-groomed as usual, the flower in his button-hole, the horn-rimmed monocle in his eye, as he scanned the people in the court with careless interest. He turned to say a word to his lawyer, and careless as he might look, was in reality in some

uneasiness. Medlow, his principal witness, had not turned up, had indeed been missing since last night. It was true that Tarne, suspecting the likelihood of this from the man's obvious reluctance to corroborate the story of the robbery, had by dint of veiled threats, induced Medlow to sign a written statement, setting forth the "facts" as he had suggested them. If the worst came to the worst this statement must be made to serve in the place of spoken evidence, and he would declare Medlow to have been taken ill at the last minute.

Nevertheless Medlow's defection angered and disquieted him, and he kept glancing from time to time at the door with an eagerness he strove to cover with his usual air of nonchalance. But his face grew darker as the minutes ticked away.

Tarne's decision to persist in this prosecution, by which on its face it seemed he could gain little, and might lose much, supposing it to go against him, arose from mixed motives. At first, in his rage and spite, he had conceived the plan purely to revenge himself upon Frane; then it had occurred to him to coerce Stella by the threat of exposing her husband's guilt, and even now, he believed that in her heart Stella cared for him, and had no love for her husband, and that when Frane was held up to the world as a thief and would-be assassin, she would turn from him in contempt to take refuge in another's arms, and that other himself.

STELLA'S indignant disclaimer of any love for him and her refusal to see or speak with him, he put down to the Puritan strain in her nature, which long association with a dull virtuous clod like Frane had only intensified, but which Tarne was confident he could eventually break down.

So he fed on his secret hopes, and alternately tormented and solaced himself with dreams of the fair woman he loved as passionately as he was capable of loving any but himself.

Nevertheless he kept Stella's scarf as a last resource, to be used in merciless castigation should she prove obdurate.

His lawyer, a big forceful bully, made a brief but telling speech for the prosecution, describing how the plaintiff had been alone in his rooms on the night of May 24, when a man, identified as the accused by a certain witness, as well as by plaintiff himself, had entered the room and garrotted him from behind as he sat at his piano, but not before he had obtained a full view of the man's face in a mirror which hung over the piano. The plaintiff, being subject to heart attacks, fainted, and on coming to himself, found his assailant gone, and himself robbed of about £200 in notes and his diamond studs, his pocket-book (produced) being flung aside after being broken or torn open. The sight of the empty pocket-book with broken straps and also the white dress shirt with buttonholes wrenched and torn, produced a distinct impression on the Court; they seemed to offer such damning evidence of guilt. Driscoll called the first witness for the prosecution, the caretaker of the Carlington, who deposed to hearing "queer" noises in Mr. Tarne's flat late on the night of May 24, voices and footsteps and a sound something like a "woman crying," but as all became quiet after a time, he had concluded that Mr. Tarne had late visitors, and "let it go at that."

His wife gave similar evidence, being disposed to enlarge on the turn it gave her next day when she found that murder had near been done.

(To be continued).