AGE had tried harder than ever that day to win. There had been the usual, the almost daily wrangle. He had brought his every weapon into service, but was overwhelmingly outclassed. His wife now leaned back upon the couch, dramatically, and sighed. The wild gesticulation, the fierce foot-stamping on the uncarpeted floor, the mixed noises—in short all that din of words clashing with words and miscellaneous sounds had wearied her. Victory was no longer a glorious prize; it was of too common occurrence; it was growing stale.

And Page—Page took his hat, and left the room. He felt like an unwelcome guest in his own house.

They had been married for seven years. They were a childless couple. It was well thus, her mother held. Oh, her mother was a sage. Nothing lay beyond her reach; everything was easy, so very easy! When she relinquished her daughter—her only child—she knew that he drank. She knew he was a bear, and accordingly it was incumbent upon her to tame and to train him. However, she had handled men, her late husband, for instance. Her late husband was a bear, too; not, verily, a big, strong, burly grizzly like Page, for he had been a small slim person of no physical power and gentle as a lamb. All the same, from Mrs. Marston’s point of view, he was a bear, being of the masculine sex.

So, on his wedding day, the experiment with Page began. He was tamed and trained by his mother-in-law, who found this occupation a fascinating pastime, a kind of sport difficult to leave. For a while, her daughter was a spectator only. But the game wearied her, it dragged like certain novels, she thought. It lacked “ginger.” Hence, at length, she herself took hold of the reins. Her mother, of course, continued to flourish the whip. But two drivers to a single steed are sometimes worse than none.

Page had cared a little for his wife the spectator, believing when he married her that she loved him. He respected and listened attentively to the counsel of his mother-in-law. In Mrs. Marston’s way of approaching him there was, now and then, a note of solemn politeness that left him with a delicate sense of awe. He saw that it was wrong in him to drink. But if he should stop taking strong liquor alto-
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together, he would lose many friends, and, really, he was not yet ready
to enter a new world. He liked his home immensely, in the beginning;
it was cosy, cheerful, elegant. Page regarded it as a magnificent gift,
paid for by himself, while selected by more competent hands.

Page could not give up drinking. While his home fairly sang
with all its beauty, the song somehow did not seem to come from
the heart. It was devoid of the emotional essence that might
have wrought inseparable ties. In the grog shops near his great ship-
building works, where dirt-spotted, ragged men drank and laughed—
men who were under his charge—he found human values in the light
of which he discovered, strangely, some of the vital needs of his own
being; bare places within his soul, gulfs of nothingness. He liked to
frequent those noisy taverns, not so much to drink as to hear the men's
stories, feel their interests, catch intimate glimpses of their ways. Page
knew their language, their crude, unpolished manner of saying things,
and thoroughly understood them. They all had something to tell;
they were delightfully articulate. Page marvelled at this; he had
nothing to relate, he thought, nothing worth a story.

Certainly, he might have talked about his great success in life. He
might have described his sure gradual rise from obscurity. He might
have spoken of certain sacrifices the cost of which haunted him now.
But he questioned the quality of his success, the longer he stared at it
the cheaper it looked. Perhaps those hoary fellows who came too
often to the grog-shops and stayed too long, perhaps their success was
of a finer clay than his. Perhaps they could have been rich, had they
desired wealth, and in the pursuit thereof followed other paths. He
did not know; money was a subject they never discussed. Some of
the men who came less frequently to the grog shops, spoke tenderly of
their wives and of their children with enthusiasm. In Page they found
an eager listener; it was all so romantically fresh to him. Had he
ever felt a desire to speak of his wife with anyone?

As for the children—he had observed them too—those little care-
less grotesque figures that tumbled about in the gutters in summer
half-naked, and in winter, painstakingly huddled up in bundles of
cloth, ran to school mornings, and at noon carried dinner-baskets to
their fathers. It was a long, long time since Page had carried a
dinner-basket.
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And he had been a child, too! This consideration comforted him now. But to-day he was a man. They called him "prominent," "efficient," "far-seeing," they praised him enthusiastically—other men. They talked so much about him and his achievements, but never about his wife, never about his home.

Why should they? After all it was of no concern to them. Yet their wives, their homes, their children were circles in which they moved with naive joyousness. It was the very spirit of this interest that led him to their haunts. He was in truth, at times, but a child in the group of childish workers; he was only the leader of the game. And the playground was his great ship-building works on the shore.

All this his mother-in-law knew. Herein lay the root of the evil for which there must be some remedy. Page was uncouth, eccentric, and he drank. If he would but give up that habit and put an end to his familiar contact with the men! How could he find happiness in the dirty grog-shops and not in his elegant home? It was ingratitude; it could be nothing else.

They had played for him, and sung for hours and hours, but Page could not appreciate the music. It floated away from his ear and sounded like dim echoes. On watching his wife's fingers trip across the keyboard he did, on rare occasions, take a certain sort of pride in her accomplishments, but he could never quite dismiss the feeling that they, the entertainers, were patronizing him.

The trivial misunderstandings, the little difficulties and the restrained quarrels all expanded in the course of time, grew more ominous of aspect. After a while the common wrangle came into use at Page's home.

And Page would take his hat and go out, feeling like an unwelcome guest in his own house.

IT WAS his birthday; he was forty years old. He had just suggested to his wife the plan of inviting a number of his friends to spend the evening with them. His wife, half laughing, responded that she had already perfected arrangements for a more or less formal reception. Page wanted to know who had been invited, Well, five or six of Mrs. Marston's friends, seven or eight of her own, and a few of Page's: a wealthy lumber dealer, a railroad president, and a certain prominent manufacturer.
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But hadn’t she invited Ritchie, and Collins, and Masterson, and—? Of course not! No! No! the idea! Who was Ritchie anyway? Who was Collins? She did not wish to know. A tired smile of faint scorn overspread her face. Page said something in a low voice, a few words uttered hopelessly in suppressed bitterness. She did not hear, she was thinking of her superior breeding. She remained standing, not listening, not even expecting any word of reply.

“Well, entertain your guests as you please,” he cried. “If I can’t have the people here that I want, I’ll go to them.”

He started to go, but stopped short to gaze with a kind of admiration about the room, at the rich lace, the priceless vases, the paintings, and, finally, at his wife. It was all very much like a quick comparison of things. She had been watching him not without interest, and as he moved across the floor she smiled encouragingly. At the door he paused.

“You might, I think you might, have consulted me, Helena. But words—words between us are pretty useless. You’ve got the stronger will, I suppose, and the straighter way. You didn’t know it was my birthday until I told you this morning. But, never mind, though a word of congratulation from you—”

She had paled a little and drew back from the fear of him, as he surmised. What, could he have frightened her? She had often reproached him for glaring at her in a weird way. He turned suddenly, and before she could express a polite thought that had come to her mind, he was gone.

In due course, the guests began to arrive; the wealthy lumber dealer, the railroad president, the prominent manufacturer, and the friends of Mrs. Marston’s. Page passed their carriages in the street.

“Have a good time, honored guests,” he smiled, turning into the alley that led to the most popular of the grog-shops.

HERE in the gloom of the narrow passage, the real dismal sadness of his condition came full upon him. He had a home, but he was homeless. He was rich, but he felt like a penniless vagrant. He was a man of vast resources, and yet it was beyond his power to harness the littlest ray of happiness. With every step he was drawing farther away from the spot that had been, imaginatively, the goal of all his endeavor.
Suddenly Page thought of Masterson, the reticent, hermit-like Masterson, a foreman in the works. Undecided, he turned, quickening his pace, and made for Masterson’s lodgings.

The foreman was at home, and a curly-haired little child lay asleep on his knee. That is why Masterson did not rise to open the door, at Page’s knock. The ship-builder, pleasantly surprised, smiled, but made no sound. For five minutes the two men sat perfectly quiet. Then Masterson carried the little girl into an adjoining room. When he returned, Page averted his face for a moment, before he found the courage to ask:

“Whose is the little girl, Dick?”

“Don’t you know? Tom Miles’. You remember him, don’t you, a particular friend of mine, he was. Killed in the works last year. Accident, some people said, I say suicide, for I happen to know what a miserable family life the poor fellow was up against. Misery, misery, and nothing but misery at home. So I took the kid, and I’m mighty glad. Excuse me a moment.”

Masterson again got up and entered the bedroom. While he was gone, Page did not stir. But in his heart many things leaped and weltered. What did it mean, all this strange feeling, for the flow of which the pulses of his being were so utterly unprepared? He looked up, startled, Masterson had returned.

“Most beautiful sight I ever saw, Mr. Page; Nancy’s face in sleep. Nothing like it this side of heaven, and nothing finer there, I guess. Have a look at her?”

The two big men moved stealthily over the floor, Masterson first, and carrying the lamp. At the side of the cot Page bent down and kissed the warm white forehead of the sleeping child. To his bewilderment she opened, very slowly, almost painfully, her eyes and looked with full security into his. Then her lips moved, and she uttered with the faintest note of joy: “Father,” and the next instant she was sleeping as peacefully as before.

“She’s the sort of kid you ought to have, Mr. Page,” Masterson ventured to remark.

But Page only stared; plunged his hands into his pockets, cleared his throat, frowned almost imperceptibly, bit his lip, and stared again, straight ahead, seeing nothing.