

# Called Back.

BY HUGH CONWAY.

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It was early in autumn, but the year showed no signs of fading. Everything was green, fresh and beautiful. The sky was cloudless, and a soft balmy air fanned my cheek. I paused and looked around me before I decided in which direction to go. Far below my feet lay the little fishing village; its houses clustered round the mouth of the noisy, brawling stream which ran down the valley, and leaped joyously into the sea. On either hand were great trees, and behind them inland hills covered with woods, and in front of me stretching away and away was the calm green sea. The scene was fair enough, but I turned away from it. I wanted Pauline.

It seemed to me that on such a day as this the shady woods and the running stream must offer irresistible attractions; so I found my way down the steep hill, and began walking up the riverside, whilst the merry stream danced past me, throwing its rich brown pebbled waters into a thousand little cascades as it shot over and foamed round the great boulders which disputed its passage.

I followed its course for about a mile—now clambering over moss-grown rocks, now wading through ferns, now forcing my way through pliant hazel boughs—then in an open space on the opposite bank I saw a girl sitting sketching. Her back was toward me, but I knew every turn of that graceful figure well enough to feel sure she was my wife.

If I had needed extra assurance I had but to look at her companion, who sat near her and appeared to be dozing over a book. I should have recognized that shawl of Priscilla's a mile away—its like has never been known on earth.

Hard as I found it to do so, I resolved not to make my presence known to them. Before I met Pauline I wanted to talk to Priscilla and be guided by her report as to my future method of proceeding. But in spite of my determination I yielded to the temptation of drawing nearer—from where I stood I could not see her face—so I crept on inch by inch till I was nearly opposite the sketcher, and, half hidden by the undergrowth, I stood watching her to my heart's content.

There was the hue of health upon her cheek—there was the appearance of health in every movement, and as she turned and spoke a few words to her companion there was that in her look and in her smile which made my heart bound. The wife I returned to was a different being from the girl I had married.

She turned and looked across the stream. Carried away by my joy I had entirely emerged from my lurking place. With the river between us our eyes met.

She must in some way have remembered me. Were it but as in a dream my face must have seemed familiar to her. She dropped her pencil and sketch-book and sprang to her feet before Priscilla's exclamation of surprise and delight was heard. She stood looking at me as though she expected I would speak or come to her, whilst the old servant was sending words of welcome across the noisy stream.

Had I wished to retreat, it was now too late. I found a crossing place and in a minute or two was on the opposite bank.

Pauline had not moved, but Priscilla ran to meet me and almost shook my hand off.

"Does she remember—does she know me?" I whispered, as I disengaged myself and walked toward my wife.

"Not yet, but she will. I am sure she will, Master Gilbert."

Breathing a prayer that her prophecy might come true, I reached Pauline's side and held out my hand. She took it without hesitation, and raised her dark eyes to mine. How did I refrain from clasping her to my heart!

"Pauline, do you know me?"

"She dropped her eyes. 'Priscilla has talked of you. She tells me you are a friend and that until you come I must be content and ask no questions.'"

"But do you not remember me? I fancied you knew me just now."

She sighed. "I have seen you in dreams—strange dreams. As she spoke a bright blush spread over her cheek."

"Tell me the dreams," I said.

"I cannot. I have been ill, very ill, for a long time. I have forgotten much—everything that happened."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Not now—not now," she cried, eagerly. "Wait, and it may all come back."

Had she been speaking of the truth? Were the dreams she spoke of but the struggles of growing memory? Did that bright ring which was still on her finger suggest to her what had happened? Yes, I would wait and hope.

We walked back together, with Priscilla following at a proper distance. Pauline seemed to accept my society as though it was a perfectly natural thing to do so. When the path grew steep or rugged, she held out her hand for mine, as though its support was her right. Yet for a long time she said nothing.

"Where have you come from?" she asked at last.

"From a long, long journey of many thousands of miles."

"Yes; when I saw your face you were always traveling. Did you find what you sought?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, I found the truth. I know everything."

"Tell me where he is?"

"Where who is?"

"Anthony, my own brother—the boy they killed. Where is his grave?"

"He is buried by the side of his mother."

"Thank God! I shall be able to pray over him."

"Macari." She shuddered at the name and said no more. Just before we reached the house in which they lodged, she said, softly and beseechingly: "You will take me to Italy—to his grave?"

I promised, only too glad to find how instinctively she turned to me to prefer the request. She must remember more than she gave herself credit for.

"I will go there," she said, "and see the place, and then we will speak of the past no more."

We were now at the garden gate. I took her hand in mine.

"Pauline," I said, "try—try to remember me."

A ghost of the old puzzled look came into her eyes; she paused, her disengaged hand over her forehead, and then, without a word, turned away and entered the house.

### CHAPTER XV.

My tale is drawing to an end, although I could, for my own pleasure, write chapter after chapter, detailing every occurrence of the next month—describing every look, repeating every word that passed between Pauline and myself, but if I wrote them they would be sacred from all persons save two—my wife and myself.

If my situation was an anomalous one it had at least a certain charm. It was a new world, none the less entertaining and sweet because its object happened to be already my wife in name. It was like a landowner walking over his estate and in every direction finding unsuspected beauties and unknown mines of wealth. Every day showed me fresh charms in the woman I loved.

Her smile was a joy greater than I had ever pictured, her laugh a revelation. To gaze into those bright unclouded eyes and strive to learn their secrets was a reward that repaid me for all that I suffered. To find that her intellect, now restored, was fit to be matched with any one's—to know that when the time came I should be given not only a wife, beautiful in my eyes, above all women, but a companion and a sympathetic friend—how can I describe my rapture?

Yet it was a rapture not unmodified by doubts and fears. It may be that my character lacked that very useful trait called by some self-confidence, and by others conceit. The more I saw to love and admire in Pauline, the more I asked myself how I could dare to expect that so peerless a creature would condescend to accept the love and the life I wished to offer her. Who was I to win her? I was rich, it is true, but I felt sure that riches would not buy her affection—besides, as I had not told her that her own wealth was swept away, she fancied her fortune was as large as my own. She was young, beautiful, and, so far as she knew, free and amply provided for. No, I had nothing to offer her which was worthy of her acceptance.

I quite dreaded to look forward to the moment which must sooner or later come—the moment when I must, ignoring the past, ask her once more to be my wife. On her answer would hang the whole of my future life. No wonder I decided to postpone the ordeal until I felt quite certain that the result of it would be favorable to me. No wonder that when with Pauline, and realizing the value of the prize I aimed at, I grew quite humble and deprecatory of what merits I may have possessed. No wonder that at times I wished that I were gifted with that pleasing assurance which sits so well on many men, and time and opportunity being given, seems to go a long way toward winning a woman's heart.

Time and opportunity at least were not wanting in my case.

I had taken up my quarters near to her, and from now on to night we were in each other's company. We wandered through the narrow Devonshire lanes, with their luxuriant banks of ferns on either side. We climbed the rugged tors. We fished with more or less success the rapid streams. We drove together. We read and sketched—but as yet we had not talked of love; though all the while my wedding-ring was on her finger.

It required all my authority to prevent Priscilla telling Pauline the truth. On this point I was firm. Unless the past came back of its own accord, I would hear her say she loved me before my lips revealed it to her. Perhaps it was the idea which at times came to me, that Pauline remembered more than she would own to, kept me steadfast in this resolution.

It was curious the way in which she at once fell into friendly, unconstrained intercourse with me. We might have known each other from childhood, so perfectly natural and unembarrassed was her manner when we were together. She made no demer when I begged her to call me by my Christian name, nor did she object to my making use of her own. Had she done so I cannot think in what form I should have addressed her. Although I had instructed Priscilla to call her Miss March, the old woman stoutly objected to this, and compounded matters by speaking to and of her as Miss Pauline.

The days slipped by—the happiest days my life had as yet known. Morn, noon and eve we were together; and I fear were objects of great curiosity to our neighbors, who no doubt wondered what relations existed between me and the beautiful girl at whose side I ever was.

I soon found that Pauline's natural disposition was gay and bright. It was too soon yet to expect it to reassert itself, yet I was not without hopes that before long that look, telling of sad memories, which so often crossed her face would fade away forever. Now and again a pleased smile lit up her face, and merry words slipped from her lips. Although when reason first returned to her, it seemed as if her brother's death had occurred but the day before, I felt sure that, after a while, she understood that years had passed since the fatal night. These years were to her wrapped in a mist; they seemed as dreams. She was trying to recall them, beginning at the beginning; and I need not say with what alacrity I lent my aid.

By common consent we avoided the future; but of the past, or all the past in which I was not concerned, we spoke freely. All the events of her early years she now remembered perfectly; she could account for everything up to the time when her brother was struck down—after that came mistiness; from which she emerged to find herself in a strange room, ill, and being nursed by a strange nurse.

Several days passed before Pauline questioned me as to the part I had played in her clouded life. One evening we

stood on the top of a thick wooded hill, from which we could just catch a glimpse of the sea, now reddened by a glorious sunset. We had been silent for some time, and who can say that our thoughts were not more in unison than any words we could have spoken whilst our strange and uncertain relations continued. I looked at the western sky until the glowing tints began to fade, then turning to my companion I found her dark eyes gazing at me with almost painful earnestness.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me what I shall find when that lost time comes back to me?"

Her fingers, as she spoke, were playing with her wedding-ring. She still wore it, and the diamond keeper I had placed above it; but she had not as yet asked me why it was on her hand.

"Will it come back, Pauline, do you think?" I asked.

"I hope so—or stay; should I hope so? Tell me, will it bring me joy or sorrow?"

"Who can say—the two are always mingled."

She sighed and turned her eyes to the ground. Presently she raised them to mine.

"Tell me," she said, "how and when did you come into my life—why did I dream of you?"

"You saw me so often when you were ill."

"Why did I wake and find your old servant taking care of me?"

"Your uncle gave you into my charge. I promised to watch over you during his absence."

"And he will never return. He is punished for his crime—for standing by when the poor boy was murdered."

She pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out the light.

"Pauline," I said, wishing to change the current of her thoughts, "tell me how you saw me in dreams; what you dreamed of?"

She shuddered. "I dreamed that you were standing by me—in the very room—that you saw the deed. Yet I knew that it could not be so."

"And then?"

"I saw your face many times—it was always traveling, traveling through clouds. I saw your lips move, and you seemed to say, 'I am going to learn the truth!—so I waited patiently till you returned.'"

"You never dreamed of me before?"

It was growing dusk, I was uncertain whether it was the deepening shade from the trees which made her cheeks look darker, or whether it was a blush. My heart was beating madly.

"I cannot tell! I don't know. Don't ask me!" she said in a troubled voice. Then she turned.

"It grows dark and chilly. Let us go in."

I followed her. It was so completely the rule for me to spend the evening with her that I did not even wait for an invitation. It was our custom to play and sing together for an hour or two. Pauline's first expressed desire after her recovery had been for a piano. Believing herself to be an heiress she had felt no scruple in asking for all she wanted, and my instructions to Priscilla being that no money was to be spared in ministering to her comforts, a piano had been sent from the nearest town.

All her skill had returned to her. Her voice had come back even stronger and more sweet than of old. Again and again she held me entranced as she had held me once before, when I little expected the fearful ending to her song, or that my fate and the singer's were so closely interwoven.

I was surprised, therefore, when this evening she turned on the doorstep and said: "Not to-night. Leave me, please, for to-night."

I urged no objection. I took her hand and bade her farewell until the morrow. I could go and wander by starlight and think of her.

As we parted she looked at me strangely, almost solemnly.

"Gilbert," she said, speaking in Italian; for Priscilla was now standing at the open door—"shall I pray for the past to return or that I should never remember it? Which will be the best for me—and for you?"

Without waiting to hear my reply, she glided past Priscilla, who stood waiting for me to follow her.

"Good-night, Priscilla," I said, "I am not coming in."

"Not coming in, Master Gilbert! Miss Pauline will be vexed."

"She is tired and not quite well. You had better go to her. Good-night."

Priscilla came out to the doorstep and closed the door behind her. There was something in her manner which told me she meant on this particular occasion to resume what she could of that authority she had been delegated to exercise over me during my tender years—an authority I did not dare to dispute until long after I had been invested with jackets and trousers. I have no doubt but she would have liked to seize me by the collar and give me a sound shaking. As it was she was obliged to content herself with throwing a world of sorrowful indignation into her voice.

"She may easily feel ill, poor young lady, when her husband lives at one house, and she at another. And here's everybody round about trying to find out what relation you two are to each other—asking me all sorts of questions and I mustn't say you are husband and wife."

"No—not yet."

"Well, I'm going to, Master Gilbert. If you won't tell the poor young lady, I shall. I'll tell her how you brought her home and sent for me to take care of her—how you tended her and waited on her all day long—how you shut yourself up for her sake, never seeing an old friend's face. Oh yes, Master Gilbert, I'll tell her all; and I'll tell her how you went into her room and kissed her ere you started on that fool's journey, wherever it was. She'll remember everything fast enough then."

"I command you to say nothing."

"I've heeded too many commands of yours, Master Gilbert, to mind breaking one for your sake. I'll do it, and take the consequences."

Feeling that the explanation, if made by Priscilla, would not only sweep away a great deal of romance, but also might precipitate matters and make them far more difficult to adjust to my own satisfaction, I was bound to prevent her carrying out her threat. Knowing from old experience that although the good soul could not be driven, she could be led, I was obliged to resort to cajolery. So I said, as one asking a boon—

"You won't if I entreat and beg you not to, my old friend. You love me too much to do anything against my wishes."

Priscilla was not proof against this appeal, but she urged me to proclaim the true state of affairs as soon as possible.

"And don't be too sure, Master Gil-

bert, she concluded, "as to what she remembers or doesn't. Sometimes I think she knows a deal more than you suppose."

Then she left me, and I went wandering about thinking as to what meaning to attach to Pauline's parting words.

"Which will be the best for me—and for you?"—to forget or to recall? How much did she forget—how much did she recall? Had those rings on her hand not shown her that she was a wife? Could she help suspecting whose wife she was? Even if she remembered nothing about our strange hurried marriage, nothing about our subsequent life together, she found herself after that interval of oblivion, as it were, under my charge; found that I knew all the tragic circumstances of her brother's end, that I now returned from a journey of thousands of miles, undertaken to learn the fatal particulars. Although she might not be able to account for it, she must by this know the truth. Keeping the ring on her finger showed that she did not dispute the fact that, somehow, she was wedded. Who could be her husband save me?

Yes, by the evidence the situation offered, I determined that she had arrived at the right conclusion; and the hour was at hand when I should learn if the knowledge would bring her joy or sorrow.

To-morrow I would tell her all. I would tell her how strangely our lives became linked. I would plead for her love more passionately than ever man yet pleaded. I would prove to her how innocently I had fallen into Ceneri's schemes—how free from blame I was in wedding her whilst her mental state was such that she was unable to refuse consent. All this she should learn, and then I would hear my doom from her lips.

I would urge no plea based upon my legal right to my wife. So far as I could make her she should be free. Nothing should bind her to me except love. If she had none to give me I would tear myself from her, and at her wish see if steps could not be taken to annul the marriage—but whether she elected to remain my wife in name, to become my wife in reality, or to sever every tie her future life, with or without her knowledge, should be my care. By this time to-morrow my fate should be known.

Having settled this I should have retired to rest; but I was in no mood for sleep. Again and again I recalled her last words and commenced one of those weightings of hopes and fears which always means self-torture. Why if Pauline had guessed the truth, had she not asked me about it? How could she spend hour after hour with me, knowing how she became so? Would her words admit of the interpretation that she dreaded what she had to learn? Did she wish for freedom and continual forgetfulness? So, on and on until I made myself quite miserable.

Many a man on the eve of learning whether his love is to be accepted or rejected has been racked as I was that night, but surely no lover save myself ever lived, who was to receive the momentous answer from the lips of a woman who was already his wife.

The hour was late when I returned from my solitary walk. I passed Pauline's window, and standing gazing up at it I wondered if she, too, were lying awake and thinking and deciding about our future lives. Ah well, to-morrow would put us both out of suspense!

The night being still and warm her window was open at the top. Before I turned away a fancy seized me. I picked a rose from a bush in the garden and managed to toss it through the open sash. She might find it in the morning and guessing from whom it came might wear it. It would be a good omen.

The blind shivered as the rosebud struck it; then, fearing discovery, I turned and fled.

The morning broke fair. I rose with hope in my heart and scouted the fears of the night. At the earliest moment I could hope to find her I started in search of Pauline. She had just gone out. I ascertained in which way, and followed her.

I found her walking slowly, with her head bent. She greeted me with her usual quiet sweetness, and we walked on side by side. I looked in vain for my rose; and was fain to comfort myself by thinking it must have fallen where she could not see it. Nevertheless, I was troubled.

And there was worse in store for me. Her hands, ungloved and with the fingers interlaced, were carried in front of her. I was walking on her left side, and I saw that the hand nearest me was denuded of its rings. The golden circlet which had shone until now like a beacon of hope, had disappeared. My heart sank. The meaning was only too clear; when coupled with her words of last night, who could fail to understand it? Although she knew herself to be my wife she wished to throw the yoke aside, Pauline loved me not—the truth which was gradually creeping from the misty past would bring her sorrow—now that

she remembered, she wished to forget. The rings were cast aside to show me, if possible, without words, that she was not to be my wife.

How could I speak now? The answer had been given before the question had been put.

She saw me looking at that little white hand of hers, but simply dropped her lashes and said nothing. No doubt she wished me to spare her the pain of an explanation. If I could nerve myself to it, perhaps the best thing would be to leave her as speedily as possible—leave her to return no more.

Moody and despondent as I felt at the discovery just made, it was not long before I found a great change in Pauline's manner. She was not the same. Something had come between us, something which entirely dispelled the old friendly intercourse; changing it into little more than conventional politeness. Shyness and constraint now made themselves manifest in every word and action—perhaps, in mine also. We spent the day together as usual, but the companionship must have been irksome to both, so greatly was it footing changed for the worse. That night I went to bed wretched. The prize I had striven for seemed to be snatched away just as I had hoped to win it!

So several days passed. Pauline made no sign, or certainly none I could construe favorably. I could bear this state of things no longer. Priscilla, whose sharp eyes saw that something was amiss, pestered me beyond endurance; and spoke her mind so roundly that I began to suspect she had already executed her threat of telling Pauline everything; and I felt inclined to attribute my failure to the old woman's officiousness in making a premature revelation. All might have gone well had I been given another week or a fortnight

to win my wife's heart. I began to believe that she was growing unhappy; that my presence troubled her. Not that she evinced any wish to avoid me; indeed, she came so surely at my beck and call as to suggest a shadow of the obedience she had always given during those days upon which I now dreaded to dwell. But I felt she would be happier and more at ease in my absence. So I resolved to depart.

I knew that my only way was to carry out my determination at once. Having made the resolve, I would act upon it next day. I packed up my things in readiness. I arranged by which coach to go. I should have three hours in the morning to give Priscilla my final instructions and to bid my wife adieu forever.

I could not go without explaining some things to her. I need not pain her by alluding to our relationship, but I must inform her that she was not the heiress she believed. I must tell her she had plenty to live upon without saying that I, her husband, would supply it. When this was arranged, farewell forever!

[To be Continued.]

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