

**SYLVIA'S
HUSBAND**

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Sylvia's Husband by Mrs. Burton Harrison

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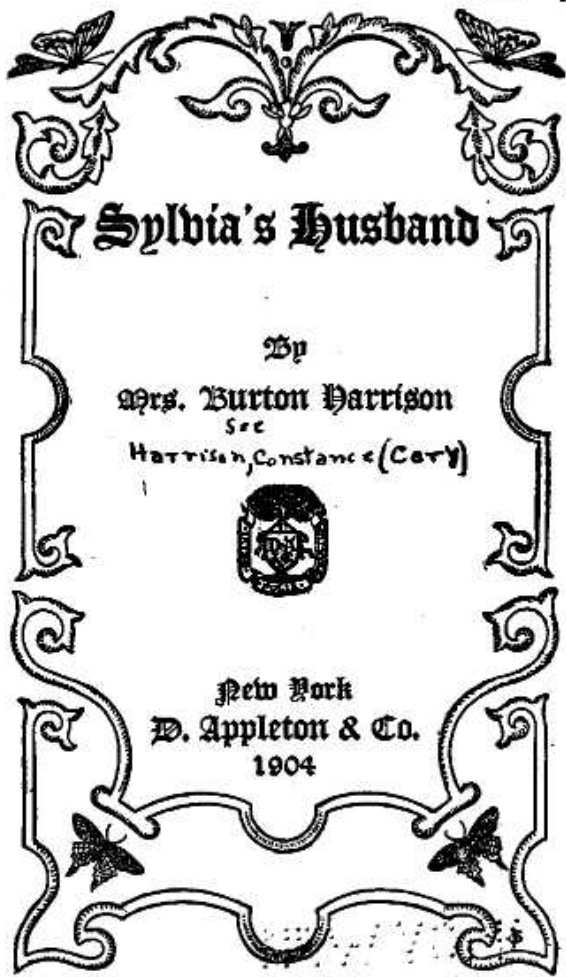
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Sylvia's Husband

I

THROUGH a green wood near a castle not far from the western coast of Ireland runs a salmon river, foaming here, tranquil there; everywhere beautiful to look upon, and coveted exceedingly by would-be tenants whenever the owner's agents in London give sign to the public that the place and its fishing privileges are to be let for the season.

Following up yonder leafy tunnel beside the stream to its finish, one comes to a halt beneath a steep flight of stone steps, affixed to a wall matted with roses and jasmine, on the summit of which, lost from below in a cloud of tree tops, is the terrace of Ballyrig Castle, upon which open the chief living-rooms.

Sylvia's Husband

There is nothing dark or frowning, or romantic or feudal, about Ballyrig. It is simply a big, pleasant old Irish country house, standing amid park and gardens and fields of grain, in a country of purple hills and boggy moors and innumerable little lakes. But a few miles away the Atlantic booms upon the shore, and Ballyrig River runs through many a mile of the estate.

Indoors the rooms are as cheerful and up to date as electricity, a London upholsterer, and a house-party of gay, rollicking people can make them.

This was, at least, the case during the summer when the castle was let to the William Hillyards, he a rich city man who two or three years before had committed the indiscretion of marrying a beautiful young wife who might have been his daughter—and he was still her infatuated slave, in spite of many disillusion!

It had been said that it was Hugh Sargent whom Natalie would have married had there been money enough between them to

Sylbia's Husband

keep this extravagant pair from the poor-house. And, by the usual irony of Fate, directly after she became possessed of an elderly, jealous spouse, Hugh Sargent had fallen heir to an uncle's title and estates, and was now a baronet, owner of a stately old show house and gardens not far from London.

Upon this bachelor establishment Natalie would descend now and again, with parties of her friends, and please herself with ordering things as if it had been indeed her own.

Hugh submitted to these and other impositions of hers in a lazy way; but those who knew him best could see that he was beginning to chafe under her assumption of a continued proprietorship in him and his. Her quite extraordinary beauty might still palliate her exactions, and cast a glamour over her pose as the victim of a matrimonial *faux pas*; but Hugh was a man of healthy mind, of daily renewing interests in life, and void of ambition to play the eternal

Sylvia's Husband

game of three, especially when the husband had recently given symptoms of vulgar and elemental jealousy in his direction. Why he had consented to come to Ballyrig at all perhaps only Kit Vail suspected.

Vail, also a member of the present house-party, a friend of Sargent's of years' standing, and a thoroughly likable and trustworthy fellow, had a reason of his own for accepting the Hillyards' bid to Ireland. He could see, very plainly, that his hostess wished to help matters along in his suit with her husband's ward, Sylvia Ridgeway, and for once—although differently inspired—agreeing with the fitful Natalie, Vail could not resist taking his holiday as her guest.

And what had been the result of this nicely adjusted scheme? Every day since the arrival of Sargent and Vail they had gone out with their rods, Sylvia accompanying them, by particular dispensation of Natalie, who loved to persuade herself that Sir Hugh's apparent zeal for sport was a blind to divert attention from his