

THE LETTER OF INSTRUCTIONS

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(Lily Adams Beck)
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THE LETTER OF INSTRUCTIONS

BY L. MORESBY

I

'Dear Eleanor,' her kindly lawyer-cousin wrote; 'I think, as we are on the subject of your will, that you may wish also to look through your letter of instructions. You gave it to me directly after your marriage, now eight years ago, and there have been changes, as there were bound to be in your long absence. Anyhow I send it, and you can return it with the other papers. I saw your husband two days ago. He was looking in the pink of condition, and evidently in the best of good spirits. He said you were very well when he left India for London.'

There was more, of course, but that was what really counted. She sat in her charming hill bungalow at Darjiling,

the windows softly shaded from the sun of a perfect summer day, and a soft-winged breeze fluttering the flower-scents on the wide verandah outside. Beyond, shimmering in the heat waves that rose from the garden, were the far-away mountains—divinely white and aloof in their heavens. But she saw none of it—her thoughts were away in a dark office in London, where she had last seen that long blue envelope with its endorsement,—

'To be opened immediately after my death. ELEANOR HOWE.'

It was sealed formally in two places, with the seal she used on state occasions; its whole appearance suggesting a library in decorous gloom, and an assembled family not without a gleam of furtive curiosity in resolutely expressionless eyes.

She had not thought to see it again. It would lie there in the safe until Reuter flashed the message across the oceans: 'Lady Howe, wife of Sir Brian Howe, commanding the Elapur District, died to-day.' But now it lay before her, and she wondered, staring at it, whether it would bring her the emotion with which she had written it eight years ago. It took a little resolution to open it and look at what might be her dead self in a far deeper sense than if it had been opened in the way she intended when she pressed that last seal. For there is no resurrection for the selves that lived five, ten, twenty years ago, whatever there may be for the physically

dead. Where do they go—those dead women who were once—one's self? And that opens yet another strange question—Which of all of them will have earned immortality? Will it be conferred on the last haphazard one, when the Black Ox treads on the wearied feet that can escape him no further? Or may one choose?

She wondered idly, still staring at the seal. 'The Heaven of the Dead Selves.' Not a bad title for an article: but how would they get on together, knowing so much too much and too little of each other? Perhaps 'The Hell of the Dead Selves' would be nearer the mark. But both would be true.

And then she opened the envelope slowly, almost with fear. She could see the room where she had written it—all her jewels, little and great, on the table, as she sorted them and wrote each against a name in the letter. None of these were grand enough, valuable enough, to be named in the will, she thought. This would be the best way to give them—yes, and the furs too. She had considered it a long while. How intensely she had felt it!

'My turquoise chain to Isabel Enderby.'

That marked a friendship that had sprung up in a night, like Jonah's gourd, and with about as much root. It had been languid on her side, determined on Isabel's. Possibly Isabel may have thought that a visit to India would be pleasant. The wife of the general commanding a district in India has a good deal in her power for an unmarried girl who happens to be staying with her. There might have been a little liking in it, too. Why not? At all events, she wrote so often, came so

often, that Eleanor found herself committed to a friendship before she had the least idea that Isabel was more than an acquaintance. Of course, she must ask her to Calcutta. Of course, she must leave her a little remembrance. Poor Isabel would be so hurt if she were forgotten!

But now—all was changed. Isabel had married a rich man at home, and the turquoise chain was a thing she might give to her governess and rejoice in a suitable mark of approval without the trouble of choosing it. Isabel used to parcel up all the gifts she did not want, for distribution among her friends next Christmas. Probably she did it still. Such habits stick. And the friendship had dwindled down to a note at the New Year. Certainly the turquoise chain might be crossed out. It had become ridiculous.

'To my sister Clare, my amber chain and pendant.'

Clare needed no chains or pendants now. She had loved them dearly once, perhaps because she could have so few. But now—Oh, why had Eleanor not sent them when they would have been so gladly, so amazedly, received? She could see Clare's light blue eyes brimming with joy and wild surmise as she opened the box. 'Who, who could have sent anything so lovely? Could it be dear Eleanor—could it! How *exquisite*!' She knew little Clare's underlinings of speech. If only she had sent them! For now it was too late. Thousands of miles away, Clare had closed her eyes in a sleep that hides its secrets of joy and amazement, and the color seemed to have dropped away from the amber and left it pallid. That, too, must be crossed out.

'My chrysoberyl ring to my cousin Laurence Wyndham.'

There was a meaning in that—else why leave a woman's ring to a man? He had always loved the mysterious jewel that is green in the day-time but rose-red when the night comes, the mystic jewel-soul of it expanding to the cold lunar influences. He and Celia were engaged, but there was very little money on either side. He would never be able to give her any of the charming superfluities she adored. Some day it would please him that his wife should have a lovely weirdness like that for her own, with all the far-away voices of legend that cling about it. Laurence would understand—he would think, 'Eleanor always knew I liked it. She did not forget.' It had pleased her to write that in the letter.

But Laurence was reported 'Missing' in the war, and Celia gave two brief months to his memory before she 'chummed up,' as she called it, with a brother officer of the same regiment. It would have been a sore wound for the boy if he had come back; but perhaps Fate recognized that he had had wounds enough, for he was spared that one. He never came back, and there was no longer any connection that justified giving or receiving, nor anything left but a sense of something half-ghastly, half-bitter in the swift oblivion of what had been so dear. She drew a black line through that.

'My cut jade beads to Alix Howe.'

That was an olive branch. Should it stand? There are some people with whom the olive branch must be an evergreen. Alix was a cousin by marriage, ten years older than Eleanor. She represented instinctive dislike, and an ugly jealousy,

impossible to be completely hidden. To Eleanor such things seemed an offense against good breeding, to say the least of it; and since Alix was akin to Brian, though rather more kind than was desirable, she had ignored some matters that most women would have resented sharply, and had not broken off relations.

Then, when she was writing the letter of instructions, the thought occurred to her that it would please Brian if she left Alix something. It would show him that she had not treasured any offense. She would like him to be sure of that when she was gone. And it might touch Alix a little. Who could tell? Personally, she always thought Alix what is called in India an 'Untouchable,' in more senses than one; but you never knew. Anyhow it would please Brian, and Alix liked little expensive elegances. Now the black pencil hovered over it, but was laid aside. Judgment was suspended.

'My cabochon opal to my first cousin, Georgia Leigh.'

Things had strangely altered there. Before her marriage, quite a promising little flame of affection on Georgia's part had been industriously fanned, for Eleanor really loved the pretty, bright young thing, and there was much talk of her coming out and seeing the world in India when she was eighteen. Eleanor looked forward to it with an anxiety that surprised herself; that affection was such a sunshiny thing in a life where the shadows were lengthening slowly but surely.

And then a terrible thing happened. In the wild turmoil and upheaval of the war, Georgia, who had been working at a hospital in Northern France, fell desperately in love with a

married man she had nursed—an officer, but so far below herself in birth and education that, even had he been free, the outlook would have been wretchedness unalloyed.

They disappeared together, almost penniless; and where they had gone no one knew. Not a word from Georgia since that dreadful nineteenth birthday when, with unknowing hand, she destroyed every hope of her life. Eleanor wept heartbroken tears over the ruin; hoped against hope that the child would write to her out of the black pit of misery. If she feared her parents still, she might write to Eleanor! But never a word broke the implacable silence. Georgia had been caught in the black cyclone that whirled away the world's hope in its frightful vortex. She was only a bit of war-wreckage now, floating on tortured seas far away from home and help and the Sussex meadows deep in buttercup and clover, where life had been so good to her.

What use to leave the opal to this sad new Georgia, even if she should ever come back to claim it?

But still she could not pencil it out. With eyes that moistened, she added the chrysoberyl ring and—yes—the fox furs. Georgia's fair hair would be so lovely above the black silkiness. She would bury her face in them, and cry—because Eleanor had remembered and had not been angry. That must stand.

She looked quickly down the list. Change, change almost everywhere. There would have to be several alterations. And in eight short years! She had been home only once in the eight, for Brian's duties kept him in India during the war; and

even there the atmosphere had chilled a little. It must be so. Why blame people for the necessity of human fate? And afterward, the deluge of the war swept away landmarks and much else. It loosened all bonds, crushed all sanctities, made every relation unstable. How could people go on writing the usual letters, when everything they knew had crashed about them?

II

And—but what was this, lying there thin and sealed in the bottom of the great envelope?

'Letter to my husband. To be given to him on my death.'

She stared at it blankly. It seemed a ghost. She had actually forgotten it. Now she remembered sealing it, with tears that gathered thick as in fancy she saw him opening it, with big trembling fingers, in a loneliness that tore her heart to imagine. What would he do? How could he endure it, with age coming on—so very far in spirit from his own people; thrown back for help and comfort on some cold sense of duty shot with self-interest, instead of her own warm companionship and devotion?

The deepest, tenderest pity filled her heart while she sealed that letter. 'My dear—my dear!' a voice had cried in her soul. Oh, if the day should ever come—if from some vaguely dreamt spirit-world she should see Brian lonely and

old, she would break back to him somehow. One is never dead in one's own dreams. Always one hears what those who are left say of one, and weeps with them in their helpless loneliness. So she had thought of Brian while she wrote that letter, and scarce could write for tears.

But now—tenfold complicated change had come between Brian and Eleanor. Very gradually, almost insensibly, they had drifted apart. How it began, she never knew; when she realized it, it was done. He found his pleasure with her no longer. What did he really care for? Nothing that she could give, though she ransacked her store with trembling anxiety. Novelty—that was out of her power. Change—he could have that better without her. The contact of flattering women—well, there is not much room for a wife in that special form of recreation. The revival of caressing memories with others, the excitements that filled up the days and drew warm rose-colored curtains against the wintry approach of age—these were the things he needed and craved. Eleanor's delicate austerity of nature wearied him—how could he help that? He could hide neither his boredom nor his temper. He did not even try, nowadays. When she kindled into a flame of delight, he yawned; when he expanded in a congenial air, she shrank.

Certainly for a while she amused and interested him. In all his many experiences he had never met a woman like her, so quick, so eager in pursuit of a loveliness which he could never understand. Her reticences and ardors alike bewildered him. He began to say that he detested what he called 'clever people.' They bored him to tears. It seemed to him a useless gymnastic, a perpetual standing on tip-toe, a perversity

which people could rid themselves of if they would; and he openly preferred the effortless companionship of women who were easily amused by the kind of things he liked. They could be a part of his life. She was not, never could be that; and duty calls, which took him away on District business, were more and more welcome as marriage became a fetter, and a bachelor life more and more to his taste.

And then he had secured long leave, directly the war was over, and really,—what with the expense and the length of the journey and so forth,—it seemed much more sensible to him, he said, that Eleanor should just go up to the hills and make pleasant expeditions there with people she liked. He was sure she had never quite enjoyed a sea voyage, and the Red Sea was trying. The reasons were many and excellent, but the long and short of it was that he did not want her.

At first she protested almost wildly. It terrified her that he should go so far alone. Could he really wish to be without her—had it come to that? And then, as she searched her own heart in the wakeful nights, she sounded the depths of a deeper terror. What if, in the lonely days that were coming, she should discover that she also could do better without him? They must not risk it. She thrust that fiercely aside and renewed her entreaties. Useless; he grew angry and stubborn, and then, quite suddenly, with the self-control which he could never understand, she saw that opposition was useless, and accepted his decision calmly. Nothing really matters as much as we supposed it would, she told herself; and, to her temperament, nothing could be worth the ugliness of a quarrel. She saw the danger, but she could say no more. And after all, if he really wanted to leave her, that was what

counted. The actual going was a small thing in comparison. Besides, she could not say the things she really feared. How could she speak of Alix, of many other shadowy terrors?

So he started, brimming with enjoyment, and parting quite kindly from her now that he had conquered her opposition. Of course it would be all right when he came back—women forget things so easily! And she went up to the clear heights of the hills, and saw people, and built up a new life which no longer included Brian. Life stands still for no one, and his presence ceased to be real and became phantasmal in her mind—the more so because she never dared to examine her feeling about him. She supposed that it might be all right when he came back and things slipped into the old groove again.

But time and distance make a gulf which nothing but love can bridge, and his letters revealed only the outward happenings, nothing of what he thought. Those letters, with their brief account of shooting, hunting, and never ending visits, represented all her share in his life now.

After three months, she began to consider. She had always written down her thoughts in a book, which Brian had never cared to see. Now they were changing, and she could not have shown them to him. She found life less strained, amazingly interesting, whether at Calcutta or Darjiling! And that reflected itself in her *journal intime*. The sense of freedom, painful at first, became delightful as it might to a bird spreading wings, cramped at first after its escape from a cage. But a great dread came with that knowledge. If change, inexorable change, had laid hold of her as surely as of him,

then what was dead in him might some day die in her, and in such different temperaments this must show itself with rending differences.

But could that ever be? Impossible. True, if that ever happened, he need not know; for Brian, who asked so much in things that she thought trifles, asked very little in things that mattered. Love he did not know what to do with; her companionship he had plainly shown he did not value. A pleasant well-run house, with plenty of distractions; a wife who smiled in the right places and was always amiable; unquestioned liberty to go his own way—are these such large demands that she could not meet them if the worse came to the worst?

But how if one has the necessity to love—to spend one's self in a passion of human pity and devotion? That had been the torment with Brian—that she needed to love him, to give endlessly; and he did not in the least care to receive. Did she care still in that way, or was it gone? That was the question.

III

And now this letter lay before her, written by the Eleanor who was perhaps dead. Would she be in the mind it represented? Would it awaken the old tenderness and make the dry bones live? Ah—that would be the test. It would mean certainty.

A letter from him, come by the same mail, lay unopened before her. She looked from one to the other, hesitating, and then, with trembling hope, took up her own. If she could think of him in that way still, all might be well. But would she? She began to read:

'Dear and beloved,'—

Her dead self struck her such a blow in the face with the phrase that she flushed crimson. It sounded as indecent as if it had been written to a stranger. Unreal, hateful, with the false sentiment of a Victorian drawing-room ballad. She thrust it from her passionately, then forced herself to read on.

'I can't *bear* to think of your loneliness if I go first, and so I write this to you with all my tenderest love. You will understand, I know.'

Could she ever have written it? Amazing! Could she ever have thought he would understand that heartbroken outpouring? No, no. She knew her Brian better now. He would take it as most suitable, most gratifying, the sort of deference a wife would naturally pay to a husband's sacerdotal position as a widower. Of course, he would never lose his deep regard for public opinion and the verbal sentiments on which it is propped; but she could see him rereading it, sitting in the most comfortable armchair in the Club—reading with nothing more than a flicker of memory.

'By Jove, that's Adair coming in! Must ask if Mrs. Adair is in town'—and then he would get up with brisk anticipation,

and the letter would be pocketed and forgotten for the time. And the times of forgetfulness would lengthen out, and all she meant to him would be put away with the undertaker's paraphernalia, and he would find life as comfortable and pleasant as ever, especially with such a testimonial to character as that letter. He had been a good husband. If he had ever doubted it (but he never did), this would quite reassure him.

And then she had actually written,—

'And when your time comes, my dear, if they let me, I will wait for you somewhere and—'

'Idiot!' she cried aloud. She could not bear to read more. She loathed the very paper it was written on. She loathed herself. Thank God, she had found it and saved her posthumous self from such a *faux pas*! It felt like the horrid dreams when one walks half-clad into an assembly; like eating with a knife; like dropping one's *h's*; like everything that is offensive and ill-bred.

Brian she did not loathe in the least. He was what he was, and could not be blamed for it, nor be expected to be anything else. Poor soul, it wasn't his fault if a silly woman had written silly things to him. He was just an ordinary Briton, extremely insensitive except to anything that he considered a personal slight. Very pleasant to all who ministered to his comforts when things went well; very much the reverse when they didn't.

A man full of genial charm on the surface, knowing his charm and exercising it to the full; his friends and acquaintances would always take his part in every difference of opinion with his wife.

'If she couldn't live in perfect happiness with that dear Sir Brian, it just shows what she was. One can't help pitying him. So easy to get on with!' That was what would always be said.

But then, they were not at Eleanor's point of view. What she was considering with smarting shame was this:—

A man whom love trickled off like rain from a tortoise's back, without even causing him any inconvenience; who had no imagination and despised it as a weakness of the brain—and she had proposed to deluge him with sentiment, which she loathed the more because he would really like the amiable intention and treat it as a personal tribute! A schoolgirl of the present generation might be ashamed of such ineptitude. And she called herself a woman of the world!

Wait for him, indeed! If it were not a syndicate reception, then Alix, who would certainly devote herself to Brian's consolation, would be quite as acceptable an escort as herself—probably much more so. Yes, that would be the ideal arrangement. Why had it not flashed across her mind and stayed her hand, when, as she remembered, she had gone on with the utmost, most reticent delicacy, to entreat him to remarry. He could not endure his loneliness—he must not, must not think it would pain her if she could know. If that

thought hindered him, somehow she would know it—and grieve. She had said something absurd of the sort.

At that point, Eleanor laid down her letter and faced her own judgment. Had she, could she have been absolutely sincere in writing all that? Had she felt every word of it; or was it the self-blinding emotion of self-pity, with a certain amount of pose in the tender anxiety of the disembodied spirit hovering over its earthly treasure?

She thought it had been honest as far as she knew then; but, as she looked up, her eye caught the photograph of Brian, in full uniform, standing beside his charger. A man created by Providence for presiding at a mess-table with genial hospitality; a man for comfortable relations with the authorities at the War Office; for discreet flirtations with women; but no—not a man to whom a woman capable of writing such a letter could possibly write it without some pose, some heightening of the lights and shadows. There must be some latent insincerity to herself and him. The letter was hateful—hateful! She was thankful she hadn't lived to see him read it!

Lived? No, that was an Irishism. Of course, she would have been dead; but supposing it had reached him—somewhere she could see her spirit, blushing, miserable, crying mutely, 'I didn't mean it, not a word of it. It's the last, the very last thing I could have written. I simply loathe it';—and Brian reading it serenely, through gold-rimmed glasses, and saying, 'Poor little woman! Very nice, indeed. She was very fond of me.'

A kind of terror seized her lest she should die before she had destroyed it. Tearing was not enough. She found her scissors and clipped it into the tiniest bits, and across again and again. Well, that was safe. She saw the last 'love' disappear with a clean cut across the middle.

Poor Brian; it was ridiculous to suppose this change of front was really his fault. Had he ever pretended to be other than he was, ever laid claim to fine feelings, or any power of affection, or an insane wish to sacrifice himself for her or anyone else? Not a bit of it. He had always been frankly, honestly selfish; and if she liked it, she could take it, and if not, she could leave it. Then it was her fault. What in the world had possessed her and had made the marriage and her letter possible? Of course she had loved him, or had thought she did. But why? She tried to remember—to analyze.

He was good-looking, but that was nothing. She was twenty-eight when they married, and he forty-six; and among her rejected addresses were two men whose good looks were quite as commendable. Besides, that kind of thing had never been a temptation to her—her needs went deeper. Love—understanding—that was what she cared for.

Position—money? No, there she could honestly acquit herself. She had enough and to spare, and never gave either a thought. Could it have been that he was the most masculine man she had ever known? Most men have a tinge of tenderness in them, a strain of the mother that comes out in little shy ways; a relenting, a refraining, a touch of idealism—things indescribable as the scent of a flower, but

evidencing that men and women spring from the same heart-root.

Of all that, Brian had nothing. He was sheer male, and could not even imagine any other point of view. The women he liked were little women with yearning eyes, who could be petted as long as it was pleasant, and 'disrated,' as the sailors say, without a murmur when they ceased to please; women whom a man could despise comfortably while he enjoyed their little feminine frailties. The women he didn't like were those who looked at him with clear eyes, and had their opinions about men's duties and their own, backed by a consciousness of claims and rights which was likely to be irksome.

'I can't bear those unfeminine women. They don't attract me!' And that was final.

But could it be that there was something in this careless cruelty and contempt that made an appeal to the primitive slave-nature in every woman? Did they hark back to the overbearing lordship, which makes no concession, and demands body and soul? Could it be that William the Conqueror knew his business when he won a reluctant princess by dragging her in the mud by her long hair, and beating her with his stirrup-leather? And could Matilda of Flanders have spoken for all women, when, her astounded father demanding to know why she now wanted to marry the aggressor, she replied, 'Because of his hardness and daring in beating me'? Certainly, women liked Brian amazingly.

But no, it never could have been that with her. She would have hated it; and even the foolish dead Eleanor had never gazed at him with yearning eyes.

She gave it up. She understood it no more now than if it had been the experience of a stranger. It *was* the experience of a stranger. It had happened to a woman who was dead. That was all you could say.

She could now remember only that she had been certain that, under all this careless good-humor and enjoyment, lay a heart, somewhere, to be won, and she might win it. She wished passionately for that. There were moments when his handsome eyes softened and grew pensive, and it seemed that he did understand—did care. And then the good minute went.

Elusive—that was the word. It was always trying to catch the rainbow; and when you thought you had it, it was a field away. He was accustomed to say contemptuously, 'Women always want what they can't have!' Perhaps it was that, after all. She certainly could not have it.

But surely things would be better when he grew old and needed less distraction? And then he touched fifty, and needed more than ever. She felt sometimes like an anxious mother trying to amuse a boy home for the holidays, with a lurking wish that they were not quite so long. Would he never grow up and care for the things that really mattered? Was the answer to be 'Never'? She wondered. Times were pleasant enough sometimes, and a wave of hope would wash the dry sand into shining beauty; and again the tide ebbed;

and, because human tides obey no moon, it had not flowed since, and the rocks were all charted and bare and ugly.

IV

But all this was useless. It explained nothing. It only wearied her. The dead Eleanor might explain all the mistakes that had landed her in this plight, but she herself could not. Let it go.

On the whole, of what use are these letters of instructions? If she rewrote the whole thing it would be obsolete in a year—perhaps less. She realized now that life is too unstable for the written word. If these things could be set down in vanishing ink, guaranteed to last only six months, well and good.

For Brian she would certainly leave no letter. He could then attribute to her whatever sentiments pleased him best. And for the others? Best to leave that undone, too, and let him dispose of the little treasures as he pleased. He loved saying the suitable thing in writing, and did it with much apparent feeling. He really would enjoy that. She could see him writing with the utmost zest to Alix, with the jade chain beside him.

MY DEAR ALIX,—

In accordance with what I know would have been my beloved wife's wish, I send you a little memento of her—a jade necklace, which she valued, and which I, therefore, value deeply. It gives me great comfort in my sorrow to choose this for you, and I hope you will take it as from us both. Perhaps you will have tea with me at the Club on Sunday. A talk over old times would cheer me a little, if you can come. I have much to say to you, etc., etc.

Yes;—and Alix's answer:—

MY DEAR BRIAN,—

How good—how kind you are. But you never forget me; and, indeed, I shall value this beautiful gift as much for your sake as for hers. What perfect taste Eleanor had! I will come with pleasure on Sunday. How could I refuse if you need me? etc., etc.

And to Mrs. Adair, whose feline softness she had always abhorred, remembering the sharp claws sheathed in velvet. They had scored her more than once.

MY DEAR MRS. ADAIR,—

I know it would be my dear one's wish that you should have a little remembrance of her friendship for you—and my own. I therefore send you a crystal-and-agate pendant, which she inherited from her aunt, Lady Westergate, and often wore. I remember your thinking it beautiful. Could you spare a few hours of your time to a very lonely man and dine with me quietly at the Club, at eight o'clock on Monday? You will understand, I know, how I feel the need of a little sympathy and understanding, etc., etc.

And Mrs. Adair, with her honeyed sweetness in full play:

MY DEAR SIR BRIAN,—

How my heart has ached for you. Nothing can soften your present grief; but I do hope that the friendship and sympathy of so many who love your genial and sunny nature, now, alas, so sadly clouded, will sustain you. What shall I say about your lovely gift! How you remember my little weaknesses, and how I shall value this treasure, which belonged to my dear friend Eleanor. Of *course*, I will come on Monday. How could I refuse anything which will bring you any comfort, etc., etc.

Could Eleanor deprive him of these multiplied pleasures? It would be positively inhuman. And to what end? For,

almost incredibly to herself, she realized that it really did not matter to her now. It would neither pain nor anger her—she simply did not care. She was astonished that she had ever troubled to set forth a list at all. The will would cover all she really cared for and must safeguard. Much better to make an unfettering exit! Brian could then say what he felt to be the suitable thing, and that would heal any little pinprick of discomfort he might happen to suffer. Yes—she would enclose a note with her will. She wrote it swiftly:—

MY DEAR BRIAN,—

I think with regard to the little possessions not mentioned in my will, it will be much better if I leave the matter entirely in your hands. I am quite sure you will do whatever is pleasant and sensible and will omit no one who should be remembered, and that is all I desire.

Your affectionate wife,
ELEANOR HOWE.

She endorsed that also, and enclosed it. Ten minutes later the turbaned servant had taken the important-looking envelope to the mail.

It was not until then that she opened Brian's just-come letter.—It began with the announcement that he had secured an extension of leave. It really would have been a pity to let

the chance slip now he was in England. He was sure she would agree with him there.

'And when I come out and find my dear wife to welcome me lovingly, as I know I shall, I hope I shall find her well and happy. What do you think of inviting Alix to come with me and pay us a visit? She is a cheery person, and would love to see something of life in India. I know she would thoroughly appreciate your kindness if you enclosed one of your nice little letters in your next to me, asking her to come. It really would be a charity. She has such a dull time with Lady Solmes.'

Eleanor read no more. She could still catch the mail. She wrote a hurried note, approving the extension of leave, and enclosing another to Alix, with an invitation quite sufficiently warm to ensure acceptance.

These despatched, she sat down again. What did it matter—what did anything matter between them any more? She had applied the test—she had faced her dead self with her living being, and at last she knew her own soul. Another self had died in that half-hour, and taken all her doubts and fears with it. She was a free woman. Her life was reborn on a new plane.

Presently she took her pencil and wrote in the little book that Brian had never read. She could always clear up a situation to herself better in writing than in her passive mind, and now she wrote swiftly:—

You think it is for you to come back—
That I wait—that I shall welcome you.
You send a careless word
That shall keep me content.
You think to find me here when you come,
Patient, ready, smiling.
That is all very different from the truth.

It is I who shall never come back—
I who have gone away.
For, though I hold up my cheek to be kissed,
And kiss you lightly in answer,
I am gone—I am gone.
I am not there any more;
I have taken wings and found my refuge,
And it is where you cannot find me.

One day you broke me and I fell—
Sank, and for a long time could not rise.
I lay still in the great deeps of sorrow!
The waves went over me.
Then I thought—I am drowned;
Never again shall I see the sun.

And yet, one day I floated up—
Not by my own will.
The water took me,
And it was still and warm,
And the sun shone bright on my face.
Thin and drained I was, as if by death.
Too weak to move.
Then, suddenly, I knew:—

I am broken, broken!
Yes—but it is a door,
And I can run through it and escape.
And I have escaped; I have flown;
I am free.
You cannot hurt me now.

When people forget the dead.
Others say tenderly,—
'O poor dead people—
To be forgotten—how sad!'
They do not know that the dead forget also—
Their hearts are hard.

I am dead to you. I have forgotten.
You will not find me when you come.
No, though I shall meet you at the door,
And hold up my cheek to be kissed.

She read it aloud to herself in a very soft undertone.

'I can't write poetry, but that's true,' she said. 'True. Perhaps I should never have known it but for the letter of instructions. And now I can begin to live. Alix used to hurt the old Eleanor. Brian, too. They can't hurt *me*. Let them enjoy themselves in their own way!'

An extraordinary sense of freedom and exaltation was upon her, shot with golden gleams of hope. There would not be very much difference outwardly, but endless vistas of new

thought and feeling opened before her. She believed Brian himself would find this reconstructed married life much more to his taste—if, indeed, he ever realized that former things had passed away. Anyhow, there it was! For years she had not felt so young and hopeful. It was like being released from sudden and disabling illness.

She left the book lying on the table—anyone might read it now. They would not understand—Brian least of all. Then, smiling, she quoted the immortal Mr. Bennet:—

'Don't let us give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things! Let us flatter ourselves that *I* may be the survivor!'

She picked up her hat and went out to have tea at the Club.

The book lay on the table.

[The end of *The Letter of Instructions* by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby]