LIFE, the INTERPRETER

A STORY

By PHYLLIS BOTTOME

Title: Life, the Interpreter
Date of first publication: 1902
Author: Phyllis Bottome (1882-1963)
Date first posted: February 21, 2025
Date last updated: February 21, 2025
Faded Page eBook #20250225

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive.

LIFE

THE INTERPRETER

BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
91 AND 93 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
LONDON AND BOMBAY
1902

ROBERT DRUMMOND, PRINTER, NEW YORK

LIFE, THE INTERPRETER

CHAPTER I

"To have what we want is riches; but to be able to do without it is power."

"BUT the extraordinary thing is that it has happened!" The lady who seemed a victim of this surprise lay back in her luxurious chair and exhibited a small foot on the fender.

"Black velvet slippers," said her companion critically, "on a brass fender are really, my dear, a poem. Where do you learn these things? Poor Muriel, her feet were always rather large!"

"She had everything in her favor," said Mrs. le Mentier, the first speaker. "Money, position, a face and figure one could do a good deal with. She was simply ruined by her earnestness. I have often said to her, 'Well, Muriel, why don't you take up the Church?' But she never did; she said it was too comfortable and that it would crush her. I'm sure she's not too comfortable now!"

Mrs. Huntly rose and went to the window. It was raining dismally, with a constant reiterated drip, drip on the tiles. She turned back, shivering a little, to the cosey boudoir of her friend with whom she had just been lunching.

"I often wonder," she said thoughtfully, "if it wasn't Jack Hurstly after all. You know I had them last summer with me; and though poor Muriel always managed things very well, there were times—— And then he went off suddenly, you know; and she said she couldn't imagine what I could see in him, though I know for certain she bore with that brutal bull-terrier of his, and pretended to like it, while all the time she loathed animals—dogs especially."

"Ah!" said Mrs. le Mentier; "and she's really dropped out—one can't do anything! All the time when she isn't actually at that tiresome Stepney club of hers she's contriving things for it—positively it amounts to a terror! She asked me last week to sing at a smoking concert for some factory hands. I told her I thought smoking concerts for those kind of people were simply immoral, and she actually flamed up and cried, 'You sing for Captain

Hurstly and his do-nothing friends, who can afford to amuse themselves, and you won't sing for men whose daily life is a hell, and whose only amusements are unspeakably degrading!' Of course I stopped her at once. I told her she should give them Bible lessons. She saw how silly she had been then, and laughed in that dear old way of hers, and said, 'You always had such a lot of common sense, Edith!' But you see she must be dropped. She'll begin to talk about her soul next!" Her friend yawned.

"Well, my dear," she said, "don't you get earnest too. That wretched Madame Veune is coming to fit me at three o'clock, so I must be off. Oh, by-the-bye, if Muriel should turn up to-morrow you might ask her to come and see me—I don't know her slum address—one must do what one can, you know. Good-bye, dear." And the two affectionately kissed and parted.

Mrs. Huntly frowned as she drove home. Muriel Dallerton had been an old friend of hers, and she really meant to do what she could for her.

CHAPTER II

"The sky is not less blue because the blind man cannot see it."

MURIEL DALLERTON knelt on the floor of a small lodging-house room by the fire. It was with evident difficulty that she could make it burn at all, for the soot kept rolling down and the chimney threatened to smoke. She had not yet accustomed herself to black hands every time she touched the shovel.

The worst of it was she expected her uncle and guardian to tea, and she had to confess to herself that the prospect was not pleasing.

She had lived with her uncle ever since she had been an orphan at six years of age, and she had been sent to an expensive boarding-school and been finished in Paris. After three triumphant London seasons, every moment of which she had lived through with the same earnest delight that was one of her most striking characteristics, she had come to the conclusion that in some way or other she was wasting her life.

She had for a whole year tried every way of doing good that was compatible with a house full of servants, a stable full of horses, and a social position. But at every turn she met with opposition—this, that, the other was "not nice"—not "the proper thing"—the horses couldn't go out—what would the servants think—she was upsetting the whole house—people would begin to talk. She confessed herself lamentably deficient in the sense of what was the proper thing, and on her own side she felt she could no longer bear the strain of the double life.

She was needed all day at the club. She had organized games, classes, recitations, employments and entertainments for men, women and children, and all needed her personal supervision.

It was not that she was not fond of pleasure—she had immense capacities for enjoyment. She was known by all her acquaintances as that "radiant Miss Dallerton"—only to *live* for pleasure that was different, and little by little she found herself "dropped out."

Society is very exacting: it demands the whole heart and constant attendance at its haunts, so that when Muriel Dallerton finally announced her intention of going to live in a model tenement next to her club, society was

careful to make plain to her that reluctantly, and with all due respect for her ten thousand a year, until she returned to her senses and her west-end house, society must pass her by on the other side. Her uncle, Sir Arthur Dallerton, felt deeply what was generally termed her "extraordinary attitude"—it cast a reflection upon him. He missed her gracious household ways, the little attentions with which she had surrounded him. He had, it is true, neglected her atrociously; but up till now she had always, as he framed it, "done her duty by him." Her living away from him was a positive slur.

Sir Arthur Dallerton was coming this afternoon to shake her resolution, and he had no doubt whatever of his success.

Muriel tussled with the fire, which finally consented to burn, then she rose to her feet, brought out some tea-things, and began to toast a muffin.

A bunch of daffodils in a cracked vase did much to improve the appearance of the room; a touch here, and there finished it; and she had scarcely taken off her outdoor things and washed her hands (very unused to the work they had been put to) when a dismal slavey announced, "A genelman to see yer, miss," and backed almost on to the gentleman in question, who with an exclamation of disgust pushed past her into the room.

"My dear Muriel," he said, "this is disgraceful!" He paused as she ran forward to meet and relieve him of his hat and umbrella. She looked up at him, her face beaming with smiles.

"Dear," she laughed, "did the blackbeetle quite crush you? How horrid! But now you'll sit down here and have some tea. You needn't insult that chair by doubting it. It will bear anything I know—I saw the landlady sit on it, and nothing happened!"

Her uncle sat down gingerly. "Were those people," he said coldly, "down in what I can only call a yard—a *yard*, Muriel!—the people you imagine you have a mission amongst?"

Muriel poured out the tea. "They look as if they needed it, don't they, dear?" she said, handing him a cup. "There, you've got a *whole* handle, and only two chips round the rim! Yes, those were some of my people. I hope they weren't in your way?"

"They are extremely in my way, Muriel—extremely; I may say I am greatly inconvenienced by them. I suppose you realize that I am alone in the world; and yet you seem to imagine that your duty is to be among these unpleasant characters in filthy slums instead of at home looking after my comfort."

Muriel smiled a little to herself as she thought of the array of servants the great house held, of the friends and cronies at the club, where he spent

the greater part of his time. "His comfort!"—surely there were enough people in the world already looking after that.

"Uncle Arthur," she said, "we've talked all this out before, haven't we? We don't see it quite in the same light. I am very sorry you are not comfortable. If the servants——"

"Muriel," he interrupted in a raised voice, "how dare you mention servants to me! Do you imagine that when I refer to comfort I mean personal attendance? You have never had any heart! Mine has always been an essentially affectionate nature. It is domestic companionship that I desire; and now that you are of an age to be of some comfort to me, you fly off to—Heaven knows where!—and throw me back on the servants!"

Muriel sighed gently and laid her hand on his. "Dear uncle, you have always been so good to me. But you see you weren't always at home, and a girl nowadays isn't satisfied simply in being domestic."

"I should scarcely have imagined *you*, my niece Muriel, accusing me of neglect! You invariably lose your temper upon these subjects, which proves that you feel yourself to be in the wrong. You know perfectly well that you can have any woman you want to live with you as lady companion, but you're so independent and obstinate——"

"That no one would live with me if you asked them," she finished merrily. "Ah!—but please don't talk about this any more," she pleaded as he strove to begin again. "We shall never agree! I must have my work to do. I cannot be happy without it, and I cannot do it at home. But I only ask for nine months of it. It is April now, and in July you shall have me back for three whole months, and do just what you like, dear. Isn't that a splendid bargain?"

The tea was very nice, and the buttered muffins especially were done to a turn.

Sir Arthur Dallerton crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair (forgetful of its former occupant). "My dear," he said mildly, "what will people say? Have you ever thought of that?"

"Yes, dear uncle," said Muriel, smiling; "I have thought of it, and I have come to the conclusion that I had better not think about it any more. Won't you have some more muffin?"

Sir Arthur Dallerton graciously accepted another piece. It did not occur to him that Muriel had eaten nothing—those sort of things never did occur to him. If it had done so he would have put it down to hysteria—the one great refuge for the selfish.

"Mrs. le Mentier," he pursued, "who is a very sensible woman, told me what people were saying, and I think you ought to know of it too."

Muriel rose and looked out of the window. It was still raining heavily.

"Well?" she said a little wearily.

"They say this is a mere whim of yours to bring Jack Hurstly to book."

The girl by the window stood quite still. She did not see the children in the yard below playing cheerfully in the gutter; she did not even notice one of her most hopeful cases reel across the court in a condition which would have filled her soul with pity and disgust two minutes before. Her uncle thought her cold and indifferent, or possibly sullen.

"Yes!" he said bitterly, "that is the sort of thing, Muriel, that your conduct forces me to put up with." Muriel faced him suddenly.

"Mrs. le Mentier," she said quietly, "is——" she paused, "is very much mistaken if she thinks such absurd rumors have power to affect me; and I do not think you need be put out by what she says, for nobody who knows either Captain Hurstly or myself would believe her." Her uncle rose to his feet.

"You seem to be in a very bad temper, Muriel," he said. "I knew what would be the result of your taking up this work. But it's very depressing to *me*. I shall go home—when you come to a proper frame of mind, let me know." She ran forward and kissed him.

"But *you* do love me, don't you?" she whispered.

"Of course, Muriel, if you would only give up your absurd whim." She drew back a little.

"Mind the stairs," she laughed; "and oh, whatever you do, don't tread on the blackbeetle." She watched him cross the yard, and bowl off in a hansom. Somehow she felt very forlorn and lonely all by herself. She was startled to feel a tear-drop on her hand. "Nonsense!" she said; "it's time for the girls' cooking class!" She gave herself a little shake and put on her things.

She found herself saying as she left the room, "If Jack thinks so I'll never, never speak to him again." She was a little impatient at the cooking class.

CHAPTER III

"And custom lies upon thee with a weight: heavy as frost,
and deep almost as life."

"YOU are quite right in thinking I care for her, Mrs. Huntly, and have done ever since I knew her," said Jack Hurstly, looking hard at an inoffensive poker. "But there's no doing anything with her. I am not earnest enough, it seems. She objects to my club, my sport, and all my set. I believe she even objects to my regiment. At any rate she thinks I am wasting my time here in England, and ought to be sweating in some beastly tropics—Heaven knows why!"

"So you ought, Jack, so you ought," said Mrs. Huntly soothingly. "Muriel is quite right. It's positively shameful the lives our society young men lead. A horse, a gun, a club and a dress-suit, what a catalogue of occupations! Can you increase it?"

"Oh, well," said her companion rather sheepishly, "I'm no worse than the other fellows, am I, Mrs. Huntly?"

"My dear Jack, she's not going to marry the 'other fellows,' is she? You had better leave them out of the question; and if your ambition is to be no worse than they are you had better dispense with Muriel. Go off and hunt somewhere, and then come back and marry a girl of your own sort."

The door opened. "Miss Dallerton" the butler announced. Muriel came forward into the middle of the room. There was such a warm, gracious dignity about her that people who had little to recommend them but the external felt thin in her presence. Mrs. Huntly greeted her warmly. Jack said very little, but as his eyes rested on her Mrs. Huntly thought that the hunting expedition, if it ever came off, must be a long one.

"I'm so glad, so glad to see you both," cried Muriel joyously, "particularly as you are neither of you going to ask me for soup tickets! Dearest Mary, are you really well? And what a comfort it is to see a pretty dress! And won't you please both tell me all about everybody, and who has married who, though they ought to have done better? I feel so ignorant." She sat down by Mary Huntly, caressing her hand, and looking with glad eyes from one to the other like a child out for a holiday.

"Oh, my dear girl," cried Mrs. Huntly mournfully, "to think that you are out of it all! It almost breaks my heart!"

"Mary, how dare you! I came to be pacified, and if I'm reproached I shall simply turn tail and run away! You don't reproach me, do you, Captain Hurstly?"

"Perhaps I should like to, if you gave me time," he said, smiling.

"Oh, but I won't, not for any such purpose—you shan't have a moment of it. But who is this?" A young girl had entered the room; she was dangerously pretty (it is the only adjective one can use), and she was perfectly self-possessed. Mrs. Huntly introduced her to them. She was a young cousin of hers, Gladys Travers.

Imperceptibly the atmosphere changed. Mrs. Huntly and Muriel drew apart from the other two, and Muriel could not help noticing how perfectly satisfied Captain Hurstly seemed with his companion, and how well they got on together.

When she rose to go Gladys crossed over to her. "May I come to see you, Miss Dallerton?" she asked. "I want so much to know about your work, and I—I like you so much! Don't think me frightful. I have lived in the States, you know, and people say all Americans are forgiven everything! I do really want so much to know you." She spoke in quick, low tones, the expression changing as the shadows on a pool change under a light wind. She was very appealing.

"Oh, but it's dear of you to like me," said Muriel, smiling. "Please come *really*, will you? You will always find me somewhere about the club—Mary has the address."

She turned to Captain Hurstly.

"I am coming with you, if I may," he said. The two descended to the street in silence.

"You're looking awfully dragged and thin, Miss Muriel," he said at last.

"You always were so hopelessly rude," she laughed.

"You know what I think about the whole thing?" he said gravely.

"Ah, it's *that* which makes me tired!" she sighed. "All my friends say just the same. They won't think how—how hard they make it for me—no—not even you."

"Even me?" he asked quietly. She bit her lips; she was losing her head it seemed; she must not do that.

"I take the 'bus at this corner," she said.

“I think we’ll go by hansom,” said her escort. She smiled.

“You always *will* contradict me, Captain Hurstly.”

“You will not contradict *me* if I remind you that you used to call me—Jack?” he ventured.

The hansom drove up, and Muriel put out her hand to him. She unmistakably intended to go alone, even though she had let him choose her vehicle.

“I may come and see you?” he asked. She frowned a little.

“I’m very busy, you know,” she said.

“Does that mean I’m not to come?”

“You might come,” she suggested suddenly, “and bring Mary’s little cousin; she can’t come alone.”

“I can though,” he persisted. She shook her head and laughed merrily.

“Mary’s little cousin,” she said as she drove off, “or not at all!” And he never went.

CHAPTER IV

"What's the use of crying when the mother that bore ye
(Mary, pity women!) knew it all afore ye?"

THE club room, large and bare, with a bench or two and one long table, was full of girls, though at first glance you might not have been inclined to call them so. They were all so inexpressibly old. As they stood talking in groups, large and broad, with their frowsy hair and draggle-tailed dresses, lifting loud, rough voices and breaking from time to time into hoarse roars of laughter, they could scarcely be called prepossessing. These were the girls who had warned a simple-minded lady Bible-reader that "if she didn't tyke 'erself orf they'd strip her"—and they would have done it.

As Muriel Dallerton entered the room the whole gang swarmed towards her in greeting. They loved her. "She 'adn't got no nonsense about 'er," "She was a real good sort, and no mistake," and they showed their appreciation of her by rushing from their ten hours' work into the club and paying with treasured pennies the tiny entrance fees she exacted for the classes.

To-day was cooking class, and from a great cupboard were drawn two dozen aprons, which they themselves had helped to buy and make.

Muriel knew just what wages they had, and never denied them the dignity of giving a little, if they had that little to give.

Two long hours' class followed. To the girls who were accustomed to factory work it was mere play, and the pleasure and excitement of seeing how Mary Ann's scones or Minnie Newlove's pie turned out was inexhaustible.

It was not until it was over and the cooking boards and utensils put away that Muriel missed one of the number. Lizzie Belk was a girl who attended most regularly, and Muriel walked over to her mate to inquire after her.

"Mary Ann, where is Lizzie this afternoon?" she asked. There was a titter of laughter from the group of girls with her.

"Ye will! will ye!" shrieked Mary Ann in a sudden fury. "I'll bash yer 'ead in for ye, Florrie Stevens!" she cried to a girl whose laughter was the loudest. "What right 'ave ye to pass it on *my* mate? I'll tell ye, miss." She appealed to Muriel. "Florrie's none so straight as she can blacken poor Liz." Muriel leaned against the table, feeling sick.

"Hush, Mary, you must not talk like that," she said at last. "What is the matter with Lizzie?" There was an uneasy silence. "The rest of you can go," said Muriel. "Good-night, girls, go out quietly, please." And the girls nodding to her in rough good-nature went out leaving her alone with Lizzie's mate.

Muriel crossed to her side and took her hand gently. "Poor Lizzie!" she said softly. "Poor, poor Lizzie!" Mary burst into tears.

"'E 'adn't ought to er done it, miss, 'e really 'adn't!" she sobbed. "She was alwers a straight 'un, was Liz, an' 'e promised 'er the lines an' all, an' now——"

"Where is she, Mary?" said Muriel quietly.

"She ain't got nowheres to go to 'cept the 'orspital. They turned 'er off to-day at the factory; an' 'er father's beat 'er somethink hawful, miss, the blasted, drunken sot!" Muriel still held her hand.

"I think we had better go and find her," she said.

"Ye won't 'ave nought to do with the likes o' 'er, will ye?" asked the girl in blank astonishment.

"Yes, Mary; don't you think Lizzie needs help?"

"She needs it bad, miss."

"Then that's what we're going to give her," said Muriel firmly. Mary still stood where she was.

"Ye—ye won't be rough on her, miss?" she begged in shamefaced tones. "'E treated 'er cruel bad."

"No, Mary, I won't be rough on her. I'm not angry at all, only so *very, very* sorry. It's such a dreadful thing, isn't it? Poor Lizzie, we must do all we can for her." Mary's big hand tightened over the slender fingers of their "wonderful lady," who seemed to understand without being told, and never said more than she meant to do.

They went out into the streets together. Lizzie was not hard to find. She was in a deserted yard near the factory, among heaps of refuse and mouldered iron. She had cried till she could cry no more, and lay in a sort of hopeless apathy, with wide, dull eyes staring straight in front of her. Muriel knelt down by her side, and Mary, with the unobtrusive delicacy many of the poorest have, turned away for a little.

"Lizzie," said Muriel, as if she were speaking to a little child, "Lizzie, I want you to come with me."

"Oh, my God!" said the girl. "Oh, my God!"

"You will come, won't you, Lizzie?" She put out her hand.

"Don't you dare touch me!" wailed the girl. "Who brought ye 'ere? Ye don't know what I am. Oh, my God! my God!"

"I know all about it, Lizzie, and you must get up now and come with me."

"They shan't tyke me to the 'orspital, I tell yer—no, nor hanywheres. 'Ome? I daren't show my fice there! D'ye see my harm an' my 'ead? Father did that, an' 'e said 'e'd kill me if I was to come back! Oh, let me alone! Why don't ye let me alone?"

"Get up, Lizzie," said Muriel, rising briskly to her feet. "Get up at once. I am not going to take you either home or to the hospital. You are coming back with Mary and me to the club, and I shall find a room for you in my lodgings."

"Oh, now, Liz, do come, lovey, do come!" Mary urged. Lizzie rose dizzily to her feet, and between the two they got her back somehow—first to the club, and when they had fed her they took her to a room next Muriel's.

The landlady did not say much. "If the young lydy choose to look hafter the likes o' 'er, well an' good, if not she could not stiy, of course." But the young lady did choose to look after her, and to pay double for the room as well, so there was no more to be said.

It was a terrible night. Muriel never forgot it. She sat there holding the girl's hand and hearing the whole story—the old, old story, told in all its crude, black reality between gasping sobs.

"'E said as 'ow I should 'ave my lines," she groaned; "an' now 'e says we'd starve. But I shouldn't care for that, miss—no, I shouldn't, if honly they couldn't call me——"

"No, dear, no! they shan't call you that," Muriel murmured. "What is his name, Lizzie?"

"Oh, 'e 'adn't er ought to a treated me so—Gawd knows 'ow I loves 'im! No!—I can't tell ye 'is name, dear miss—don't hask it!"

"But you must tell me, Lizzie."

"Not if I was to die for it, miss!"

"If you tell me I can help you, Lizzie, perhaps to—to get your lines."

"Oh, miss, 'e'd never forgive me!"

"Then I can do nothing, Lizzie."

The girl sobbed afresh. Muriel rose and went to the window. Out of the dark clouds the stars peeped timorously, as if afraid to look down on the sad,

sordid world beneath. A church clock chimed the hour—twelve o'clock—and from the public-house across the way a burst of brawling voices broke. It was illegal she thought to close so late.

The candle on the washstand flickered miserably. She went back to the bedside, and with careful, tender hands put back the heavy hair and sponged away the tears.

"Lizzie," she said, and it seemed to her as if the whole of London stood still to listen, "there is some one I love with all my heart—I—I think I could forgive him anything." She drew in her breath with a long gasp. "Now—won't you tell me his name, Lizzie?" she pleaded. The two women looked at each other. The girl raised herself on her elbow and stared as if she were weighing the soul of the other woman (she had forgotten she was a lady). At last she sank back satisfied. "If she had a man," Lizzie thought, "she might understand."

"It's—it's Hobbs—Dick Hobbs," she said. "Ye won't be 'ard on 'im, miss. They can't 'elp it, can they? Not as I knows on—an' hanyway 'twere all my fault, I think."

"I—I won't be hard on him, Lizzie." The tears were rolling down her cheeks. "And now I'll put out this light, and you'll go to sleep, won't you? And to-morrow I'll see Dick and get a license, and—and everything."

"Oh, miss!" cried the girl—"not my lines?"

"Yes, Lizzie! If you're a good girl and go to sleep you shall have your lines to show." Muriel left her. When she came back a few minutes later she found the exhausted girl fast asleep; her face was red and swollen still with crying, but there was a happy smile on her lips. She was only seventeen.

"And there are thousands like this—thousands," thought Muriel. "God forgive us our blindness and their pain."

Suddenly she felt very faint and dizzy. She remembered she had had nothing to eat since her tea with Mary Huntly. She covered her face with her hands, for she realized more overwhelmingly than ever that she could never marry Jack Hurstly. But though she had cried for the other girl, no tears came now.

CHAPTER V

"My God, I would not live, save that I think this gross,
hard-seeming world
Is our misshapen vision of the Powers behind the world that
make our griefs our gains."

A BROAD-BUILT, hulking fellow with a coarse, brutal face shouldered his way towards Muriel. It was one of the men's evenings, and she had dropped in a moment to speak to the superintendent, and to give one of the men something to take home to his sick wife. When the man reached her she led him to a quiet corner of the room. She had never felt afraid yet, nor did she feel so now; only as she looked at the flushed, scowling face she felt a little hopeless.

"They said as 'ow you wanted to speak to me, miss."

"Yes, Dick, I do." She paused, wondering how best to make her appeal to him—where in fact was that spark of the Divine she so passionately believed in, so seldom touched, yet trusted that she touched more often than she knew. "Lizzie is with me, Dick," she said at last. "Do you think that you have treated her quite fairly?" The scowl changed to a senseless, meaning smile. Muriel felt her eyes flash, but she had herself well in hand. "Do you think it is quite a brave, manly thing to do," she asked with slow, quiet intensity, "to ruin a girl's life—a girl you pretend to care for—who has trusted in you? Would you not be ashamed of breaking your word to another man? Yet you seem to think it no great harm to betray a woman! A woman like Lizzie too, who is only a child after all, and who kept so straight. She is very ill indeed, Dick, and when—when the child is born I think she will die. Wouldn't you call a man who had behaved so to your sister a—a murderer?" The man's sullen eyes were fixed on the floor; he shifted awkwardly from one leg to the other.

"I don't see has ye 'ave hany call to speak to me like that, miss. I ain't no worse than the other chaps I knows on. I'd like to do fair by Liz, but I ain't earning enough to keep a wife."

"You should have thought of that before you made Lizzie a mother," said Muriel sternly. "And now you will leave her alone to starve," she added with quiet scorn, "after having taken away her only chance of earning her living, and—and having done the very worst you could."

The man said nothing; his face was heavy with inarticulate rage; she felt that he wanted intensely to knock her down. One of his mates remarked to a group of men that "'Obbs looked horful hugly." It did not occur to him though to walk away. Suddenly her voice softened.

"Dick," she said, "you're not that sort of man at all—you know you are not. You hadn't thought of it before—that was all, wasn't it? You didn't mean to harm poor Lizzie so. And she loves you, Dick—she wasn't a bit angry with you—she doesn't blame you at all." (It had not exactly occurred to the man that she did. It was a new idea to him that she had a right to.)

"And—and so I can tell her that you *want* to marry her—will marry her at once, Dick, won't you, before—before it's too late? You will let me tell her that, won't you?" Still no answer. "I trust you," she said softly; "I feel so sure that you have the makings of a good man."

His eyes were glued on the floor. He felt more bewildered than angry, and still obstinately clung to silence, which could not, as he phrased it, "let him in for anything."

Muriel took a rose she was wearing. With a sudden impulse she held it out to him. "I gave Lizzie one," she said gently, "one like this. Would you like to wear it?" It seemed easier to take it than to speak, but somehow he was impelled to look at her. Her eyes were fastened on him with a look he never forgot—grave, earnest, truthful—as if she had weighed his soul and was simply waiting for the proof of her judgment.

A voice he scarcely recognized for his own growled, "Well, then, what if I does?"

"Thank God!" she murmured softly. "Thank God!" He waited for his answer. She smiled at him so wonderfully that he felt the tears rise to his eyes. Her own eyes swam in them. "I will help you all I can," she said. "Now come with me to Lizzie." He followed unwillingly.

The men by the door shouted something after him as he passed. He did not hear. He followed her clumsily with creaking boots into a room that resembled nothing he had ever seen before, though it was simply furnished; and sitting in a large chair by the fire was Lizzie. Her eyes were fastened on the door with a dumb, questioning look. She moved her lips as if they were dry. Then she saw him.

"Oh, my man! my man!" she cried. Muriel shut the door quietly, and left them alone together. She felt suddenly as if she could never feel hopeless again.

CHAPTER VI

"The tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."

"YOU have not come to see me for some time, Jack, yet we used to be good friends once, didn't we? One seems to have one's seasons for those kind of things, then they drop out. With sleeves, you know, one mustn't keep the fashion on a bit too long. I have known dressmakers—but I won't trouble you with my philosophy. I am going to have dear Mrs. Huntly and a charming cousin of hers to dinner, and so thought you might, perhaps, care to join us, though I'm candid enough to admit I hope it will not be merely for the charming cousin's sake.

"EDITH LE MENTIER."

Jack Hurstly read the note, written on rich, heavy cream, a tiny, definite hand between large margins. It all seemed very familiar to him. Three years ago there used to be a drawer full of them, though he had burned them of course, he remembered, after the scene in the garden. It had all been very graceful and harmless, and he had immensely admired and pitied her with her dense husband, who shattered her dainty little subtleties with a heavy word or two, and "called things," as she plaintively remarked to Jack, "by their proper names, as if things," she had added, "should ever be called by names at all, and least of all by their right ones."

Then he had met Muriel. He thought of that first evening, and of her frank, disarming look, and of how she not only did not say things she did not mean, but actually went so far as to say the things she did.

It was a change from a little winding stream now here, now there, to a free, open lake with its clear reflection from the sky.

It was natural that after this should come the scene in the garden; what he could not understand was this little dinner three years afterwards.

Curiosity and Muriel's wilful remoteness prompted him to accept the invitation; but he did so formally.

Edith, when she read his letter, broke into a little laugh.

"A joke, my dear?" her husband asked, looking over his newspaper across the breakfast table.

"Certainly not, Ted," said Edith; "I should never dream of laughing at a joke at breakfast time!" Her husband returned to his sporting notes—they seemed to him so much easier to understand.

Mrs. le Mentier prepared to meet her guests by dressing in Jack Hurstly's favorite color. It happened to be the one which suited her; but it is possible she would have worn it if it had not. It takes a woman longer than three years to forget a man's favorite colors, and longer still not to wear them when she remembers.

Gladys Travers was the first to arrive, with Mary Huntly's brother, a deeply earnest young clergyman with thoughtful eyes. "Cyril had to bring me," she said, smiling, "because Mary had a headache, one of those horrid dark-room ones, you know, with tea and toast. I don't believe he quite approves though of dinner parties, do you, Cyril?" Mrs. le Mentier shook hands with him sympathetically.

"I know quite well what you feel," she said in her slow, gentle voice. "It's the herding together of rich people to eat brilliantly, while all the great half of the world have no brilliance and no dinner, and I think it is so good of you to come. I've only just *really* one or two to-night, so I hope you won't find us very worldly."

Cyril Johnstone had blushed at his cousin's speech, but now that his hostess paused he said gently, "Mary was so very sorry she could not come."

"Dear Mary," Edith murmured as she glided across the room to welcome two men who had entered at the same time—Jack Hurstly and a young doctor, a man of good family and even better brains. "How good of you to come, doctor!" said she, her eyes sparkling their most vivid welcome. "One feels," she said, turning to the young clergyman, "with busy men like you what a debt of gratitude one owes. Now you, Captain Hurstly," she added (for the first time addressing Jack), "had, I am sure, nothing to give up?"

"Everything to attract, certainly," said Jack with a smile at Gladys, who was glancing with laughing, observant eyes from one to the other.

Dinner was announced, and Edith, taking the young priest's arm, followed the rest of the party. She was thinking it extremely stupid of dear Mary to have a dark-room headache, and she was talking to Mr. Johnstone on the marvellous utility of Bands of Hope.

"Yes," she said, glancing over the flower-decked table, "it's the name itself. Hope! What a lot it calls up, doesn't it? Spring mornings, one imagines, and skies too blue to deny one anything. There's something in the word which makes one think of waves."

"Because they break themselves on the rocks?" suggested Gladys, "or cover quicksands?"

"It's a word," said the doctor, smiling, "with a very expansive meaning, and a use even more expanded than its meaning."

Mr. Johnstone looked across to Mrs. le Mentier. "It's one of the cardinal virtues," he said gently.

"And they," said his cousin, looking at Jack, "always close a conversation, because you see it's so inconvenient to have to take off one's shoes."

Mr. Johnstone looked shocked, and Edith started another subject.

"My husband," she said, "is away—fishing, I think it is. He has, poor man, a deadly feud against all animal nature, and he spends his time trying to exterminate it. I must confess it seems to me rather a hopeless quest."

"Don't you English say," asked Gladys of the doctor, "that it's strengthening to the character?"

The doctor smiled. "More to the muscles than to the character, I should fancy," he said.

"But isn't it one of your tests of a character," she persisted, "in England that it should *have* fine muscles?" The conversation became international. Edith watched, but took no part; she was listening to Jack, who was not talking to her.

He was instead appealing to Cyril Johnstone. "Are you at all interested," he asked, "in those slum clubs?" The priest's face brightened.

"Immensely," he said. "My work is there, you know, and so I have seen a good deal of them. But of course you refer to those under parochial guidance?"

"Captain Hurstly," Mrs. le Mentier broke in, "is referring, I feel sure, to the sweetest free-lance in the world, a dear friend of ours who has thought it her duty to disassociate herself from her home, and even to a certain extent from the Church, because she thinks she can, as the phrase goes, 'reach nearer to the people's hearts' that way. You'll admit it's heroically brave of her. People's hearts give one such shocks when one *does* get near them."

"A case of hysteria," murmured the doctor under his breath, "in its most patent modern form."

Gladys glanced lightly at Jack Hurstly; then she said in a sweet, penetrating voice, "There you are wrong, doctor. Muriel is the most healthy-minded girl I know."

"Her hysteria may be confined to one form," he ventured.

"Ah, but you should see her!" said Gladys. Here the voice of Cyril Johnstone broke in.

"It seems to me," he exclaimed, "the saddest thing in the world and the most useless. There has been too much talk about the people's hearts, too many missions of sentimental women. What can they give the people? Their need, their crying need, is for the cultivation of the soul, and it is we—set apart as God's ministers—who are called upon, and to whom alone rightly belongs the unspeakable privilege and duty of serving the poor!"

Mrs. le Mentier looked gravely devotional and stifled a yawn.

Jack Hurstly looked at Gladys, who again meeting his look broke out into a defence.

"And while the Low and the High, the Broad and the Long (if there *are* any long, or if they aren't all long), quarrel as to who shall help the poor, and how they shall be dressed to do it, what are the poor going to do? And why shouldn't a woman, or even a man for that matter, go down among them and teach them how to live? What kind of souls are you going to teach in wretchedly uncultivated bodies, cousin Cyril? And if you believe in clubs, why aren't you thankful for their work, even if the clergy are not asked to take Bible classes in them? As for Muriel and her poor, she's taught them how to smile, and I actually heard one of them say 'Thank you' the other day. I don't believe an archbishop could do as much even with his robes on."

Mr. Johnstone opened his mouth to answer her tirade; but Jack Hurstly, who had been listening delightedly, clapped his hands and laughed, and he felt that it was impossible to argue against a joke. Mrs. le Mentier rose to her feet smiling. She felt that her dinner had not helped her much; and she did not love Gladys.

"Let us leave the gentlemen alone, dear," she said, "to discuss our shortcomings and their dominion. It's an entrancing subject, I believe—when you can have it all your own way."

The two women floated gracefully out of the room. They were rejoined very shortly by the men, whom it is presumed found their points of view on "the entrancing subject" too different for prolonged discussion. Gladys and the doctor stood out on the balcony.

The balmy June evening filled with the noises of the streets below seemed very soothing to them, and their talk interested both immensely, so much so that they did not hear Mrs. le Mentier preparing to sing, and only ceased when her low, sweet voice rang out, "Life and the world and mine ownself are changed for a dream's sake—for a dream's sake."

It was a simple song, but she sung it with a quiet passion and intensity that entirely captivated her audience. When the song was over they were not ready with their applause, and even the doctor looked as if he had met an ideal. Edith sang again, and they went home, all but Jack Hurstly. "I must speak to you a minute, Jack," his hostess had murmured as he turned over the leaves of her music, and for the song's sake he stayed.

She stood in the middle of the room, her hands held loosely in front of her, like a child's. "Haven't you punished me long enough—Jack?" she asked.

"My dear Mrs. le Mentier," he began.

"Ah!" she murmured, "Mrs. le Mentier! Mrs.—le Mentier—Jack!"

He had before wished that he had never come; there seemed now nothing else to do but to wish it more strongly. She looked so young and piteous, and her eyes were full of a real emotion. The only ways left were to be weak or brutal. The last alternative would end the scene quicker.

"It doesn't seem much good, does it," he finally said, "to go over all this again?"

She smiled wistfully. "Is it all over then for you?" she asked. "Do you know, it was silly of me, wasn't it? I somehow thought you might still be the same, and the three years' penance enough for the past mistake?" She spoke with a kind of strained slowness very pitiful to hear.

"Things have changed so!" he muttered.

"Things?" she laughed. "How a man falls back on the inanimate! Things don't change, my dear Jack, but women grow older and men grow wiser—that's all. Let me congratulate you then on your increase of wisdom, and you will be a little sorry—for my increasing age?" He frowned and looked at the door; she winced as if he had struck her. "You want to go?" she said. "Well, there's one thing, my dear Jack, for you to remember. If you should get tired of your sweet firebrand in the slums, 'things have not changed,' you will remember, won't you? And women don't—so the way is still open."

He stepped past her to the door, but he turned back to look at her (he often turned back). She was twisting her fan in her hands and trying to smile.

"You can always come back," she said.

"Oh! I'm not such a brute as that!" exclaimed the man at the door.

"Oh, aren't you?" she laughed. "You have your limits, then? I'm so glad! And you had better go now, for I have mine too."

When the door closed firmly after him limits seemed to dissolve. She put the fan down carefully on the table, and she looked at her miserable face in the glass with a vague, ulterior satisfaction, for even if one's heart was broken it was something of a comfort that one looked distinctly pretty in tears.

CHAPTER VII

"So long as we know not what it opens, nothing can be more beautiful than a key."

THE short June days soon came to an end, and Muriel found them none too short, for warmth can only be enjoyed by the luxurious, and her life at present was anything but that.

If one plunged into the work and life of the people it needed strength both of will and body to carry one through its disillusions.

There was nothing in the least exciting in the work before her—it was merely very hard. Occasionally it was true the great opportunity would arise, as it had done in the case of poor Liz. But next to their extraordinary infrequency came the swiftness with which all the greatness evaporated: their very sins were so matter-of-fact, and the larger elements in life were taken so unpicturesquely that they seemed shorn of their solemnity, and then strangely robbed of all "the trailing clouds" of mystery. When a widow spoke of her dead husband as "'E made a beautiful corpse, 'e did—yer ought to er seen 'im, miss," the word died on her lips, and to look at a dead baby as being "one less mouth to feed," jarred on all her tender notes of sympathy by the crudity of its truth.

Muriel wrote to Gladys, who, strange to say, had come to see her alone, not once but often, that she had never known "death could be vulgar before;" and, though she felt very worried at the thought of shutting up the club for three months, she confessed to herself her heart rose at the thought of the long, easy luxury of house-parties, country days, and even a glimpse of the sea. People, too, who said a little more—and meant a little less—she looked forward to meeting with a positive sense of rest. Clear black and white were rather glaring she thought, and how life was mellowed by a little mist! Jack Hurstly had never been to see her. She had heard of him occasionally from Gladys.

Sir Arthur wished her to come at once to Blacklands, a house in a beautiful vicinity, not too far from the conveniences of life; and towards the end of July, very tired and fagged, Muriel packed up her things to go. There were many good-byes to be said, but they were all over now with the exception of Liz—Liz and the baby. She had not seen either of them lately.

As she knocked at the door she heard the long, fretful wail of a sick child, and then the ungracious tones of a woman's voice.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" she added shrilly as Muriel entered. "I thought you had given us the slip. No, I ain't been comin' to the club, nor I don't mean to —nor Dick neither, we 'ave 'ad enough of it, we 'ave."

Muriel showed no surprise. She sat down and looked at the poor little baby tossing disconsolately on its mother's lap.

"Isn't he well?" she asked.

"No, 'e ain't," said Liz more gently; "'e do take on somethink hawful in this 'eat. 'E cries all night, and Dick won't come nigh 'im. I'd a been a deal better off without 'im, that's what I'd a been. What's the use o' a 'usband who drinks all 'e earns? 'E don't do *me* no good, and I don't do 'im no good —we're better apart." She looked at Muriel viciously in her increasing anger and fear, turning on the first object she met.

"You're very tired, Lizzie," she said gently, "and very hot. Have you been sitting up all night with baby?"

"I don't keep no nurse!"

"Poor little thing," said Muriel, holding out her arms for it; "poor little dear."

"'E'll crease your pretty skirt." Muriel laughed.

"Now, tell me," she said, "what do you mean about Dick. Is he really taking to drink?"

Lizzie forgot her resentment and poured out her troubles, and so again the woman in Muriel conquered. Yet she knew that there would be no gratitude for what she did. Lizzie only envied her—"her pretty frock."

She wrote to her uncle promising to go down the next day. Muriel arrived at Blacklands to be met by the footman and a carriage. The trappings of a luxury she had spurned seemed at present very grateful to her. They belonged, she realized, to a class of things one does not actually need, and yet seems to miss more than even the necessities. As she drove comfortably through the village she was possessed by a complete set of new faculties. All her old fund of light-hearted laughter sprang again within her; her quick, observant eyes (which she had used more lately to ignore than to observe) found beauties at every turn. She felt a desire to sketch two cottages half lost in honeysuckle planted with the most perfect effect of naturalness under the old tower of the ivy-covered church. The churchyard seemed the most perfectly restful thing she had ever seen. She longed to pick the hedge flowers; to let the wind blow about her hair, with no restraining erection to

keep it in place; to walk barefoot across the cool, green fields; to hunt for birds' nests in the wood; to climb the hills at sunset time—in short, a passion of longing to come near to Nature held her; to forget all the many inventions of the clever, brutal, unscrupulous mind of man; to be once, for however little time, one with the world as "God has made it." She found herself taking off her gloves, and at that moment the carriage swept up the drive of a large old house, with an exterior too ancient to be quarrelled with, and an interior too full of the best of modern "improvements" to be in the least appropriate.

Gladys was standing on the steps. She held Muriel in her arms. On the younger girl's face there was an almost passionate welcome, and she tried to hide her eagerness in laughter, chatting in graceful snatches over a thousand little nothings as the two girls went to their rooms. "Did Muriel know that there was no one there but themselves?—everybody was coming down to-morrow. Yes, that abominable little flirt, Edith le Mentier, and her husband with his exquisite stupidity, a cloak which covered all his other sins—in the eyes of his wife at least. Mary Huntly, too, not Tom—he couldn't. These business men really worked; but Muriel was a business woman, wasn't she—the dear Muriel." Muriel declared she only worked for the sake of enjoying laziness. They went down to tea. "That doctor, too," Gladys continued, "with an advanced sister with red hair, cigarette and a bull-dog—at least I think it's a bull-dog."

"Of course it is," laughed Muriel. "You must retain something, however far you advance, and the bull-dog does that for you."

"The doctor overworked, you know; and the sister's devoted. Then there's Captain Hurstly, of course!"

"Why of course?" said Muriel quietly.

"Oh, well——" Gladys stopped, "don't you want him?"

"No, my dear, I don't."

"Your uncle thought——"

"Oh, when he thinks," laughed Muriel, lifting her shoulders.

"And there's a friend of his——"

"My uncle's?"

"Silly!—Captain Hurstly's—a Sir Somebody Bruce."

"Alec?" suggested Muriel, quietly selecting some seed-cake. "I know him well."

"Do you?" said Gladys, "I scarcely know him at all. What did you think of him?" Her little air of indifference was beautiful. Muriel sighed.

"He's like the rest," she said wearily. "Splendid, capable, broad-shouldered and—useless. I think if I were a man like that I should use my talent as a good shot for personal purposes; it would seem to me less wasteful."

"Oh, but, Muriel, we girls we're none of us any better. You, dearest, you're different. And in America I was different too. There's so little strain in being happy there—so little waste in pleasure. The rush of life, its width and lack of limits, is a continual occupation; but here there are too many women. Some of them must be old maids. It's like the game of musical chairs. They none of them, you see, want to be left out, so they take the first place vacant. They have an eye on their opportunities; they make efforts to attain, and a masterly mamma backs them. When you come to think of it—their training, their suppression! You can't wonder they take their first opening. But for women to be hunters—forgive the naked, cruel term, darling—is repulsive. Oh, if I had a daughter I should drown her, or bring her up to something more worth living for!"

She walked about the room putting this and that to rights. The housemaid had done it before her, but the quick, nervous movements delivered her of the tension she seemed under.

"Something's very badly wrong," thought Muriel, and aloud she suggested the garden.

The birds were making twilight magical on the velvet lawn. They sat breathing in the soft, rich air, heavy with the scent of summer flowers, too utterly at peace with Nature and the restful spell she can throw at moments over the most tortured hearts to do more than hush themselves into silence.

Muriel was the first to speak. She remembered long afterwards how startling her voice sounded.

"You have something to ask me?"

"Ah!—no, no."

"Something to tell me?"

"It's hard—oh, Muriel, dearest—dearest, it's hard!" cried Gladys.

"Hard things are sometimes better shared," said Muriel.

"The hardest and the dearest sometimes can't be," Gladys sighed. "What can I do?" she added miserably. "It's so old and stale, just the eternal wrong situations Nature pulls about so, or man gets twisted into! Mary, my cousin, you know, wants me—wants me to marry. I'm dependent on her, you see, since father failed in the States. They had me educated in England, and they ruined that for me—the steady setness that might have helped me now—by

the wildest three years in America. Sixteen!—and their world without barriers, where everybody wants you to have a good time! No, I'm not crying—not for that. It lasted three years, and after the smash they sent me here. Mary doesn't know what to do with me. I'm not her sort—I'm always getting into scrapes. I seem to have got into the nursery again, where there is nothing but corners. I'm in leading strings to a—maid. There's only one way out of my nursery, Mary says—Muriel, it's open now—but I almost think I'd rather throw myself out of the window than make use of it."

Muriel looked at her. "And is there no other door?" she asked gently.

"Ah! not mine—somebody else's, and—they've got the key."

"Where does it lead to?" Muriel asked.

"I—I don't know. The most beautiful place in the world, I fancy; but if it was a wilderness it would be the only way for me!" Timidly Gladys put out her hands, and Muriel held them, drawing the girl closer to her. She asked with wonderful mother-eyes the question no words could draw from her.

"Yes," she said at last, "people made a mistake when they thought the world was large. It's very small—one woman's heart can hold the whole of it."

"Muriel," the other gasped, "Muriel, do you care for him?"

"For Alec Bruce, dear child? No!" Suddenly her hands grew cold, a fear seized her, cutting her breath short and making the silence strangely empty. "You don't mean him?" she asked very slowly as if she were just learning to talk. The girl shook her head. "You mean Jack Hurstly?" pursued Muriel gently inexorable. The girl caught her hands away and covered her face.

"Oh, Muriel! Muriel!" she sobbed. "I don't—I don't care for him."

"Neither do I," said Muriel very coldly.

"Don't you?—don't you?" the girl exclaimed, her eyes shining like stars through a cloud. "Then, oh, dearest—my dearest, give me the key!"

Muriel stood quite still smiling. She felt as if she were having a photograph taken; she must not move; she must try to look pleasant—that's what they call it. She was still so long that Gladys looked up in wonder. The elder girl drew her into her arms.

"It will be sure to come out well," she murmured. Then aloud: "Little darling, you have always had the key—mine was only a skeleton one, and, Gladys, I never could have used it." The girl clung to her shivering with joy.

"Then, after all, you do care for him a little?" Muriel said tenderly. Gladys lifted up her eyes. They seemed much older—they were so happy and so sure.

“I told you there was only the one way—the one way in all God’s earth for me. I think I should have thrown myself out of the window if you hadn’t given me the key!”

“Oh, don’t!” cried Muriel half sobbing.

Gladys smiled. “Dearest, you don’t understand—you see you don’t care for him as I do!” she said.

“No,” repeated Muriel very slowly and carefully, “I don’t quite understand—you see I don’t—don’t care for him. Do you know, little dear, it’s getting rather chilly. Hadn’t we better go in and dress for dinner?”

“Oh, to think of dinner!” laughed Gladys. “How we do mix things, don’t we? It’s too terribly material.”

But of the two she had the better appetite. Muriel had never lied before, and she found it very tiring.

CHAPTER VIII

"A self-sacrifice that is thorough must never pause."

"Sunday," said Edith le Mentier, lazily swaying her parasol, "does my religion for me. When I hear the sweet church bells chiming over the cow-laden fields I say to myself this is a Christian country. Cows and a church—certainly I, too, must be a Christian."

"And your responsibility ends there?" asked Gladys, who with others of the party was dressed to go to the little church across the fields.

"My responsibility, my dear, er—Miss Gladys—as you so deliciously call it, is never at work in that sphere. No! I recognize it at my dressmaker's; I am crushed under it in shops; I frequently come face to face with it in the choice of a cook. Beyond this," Mrs. le Mentier put out a dainty foot under a frilled petticoat, "beyond this I am a rational being—that is, whenever it is possible I persuade some one else to do my effort-making for me. Captain Hurstly, I want a footstool; dear, delightful creatures, do go and do my praying for me; Sir Arthur," here she put her head graciously towards their slightly embarrassed host, "is going to stay to keep me company."

"Delighted, I am sure," murmured Sir Arthur, handing Gladys' prayer-book which he had been carrying to the doctor, who stood grimly and uncompromisingly silent. It was natural that after that Gladys and Dr. Grant should walk together and Muriel find herself with Jack Hurstly. Cynthia Grant, the doctor's sister, had not yet returned from a visit to the stables with Sir Alec. Muriel had not seen Jack for some time. He was always large and masterful (in the most calmly protective meaning of the word), but there was to-day a certain alertness and unobtrusive eagerness in his manner that was new to her. They knew each other well enough to be able to float off easily into commonplace chatter. It paved the way for all the important things which lost their stiffness by being set in a background of familiar banter.

"I'm having a holiday," said Jack, smiling down at her oddly.

"You a holiday! You look terribly as if you needed it!" she laughed.

"I've been working rather hard, really," he said.

"Fishing is over?" she asked.

"Oh, Miss Muriel, but I've had a harder job to tackle. I've been trying to get the place at home in decent order—getting cottages built and all that sort

of thing."

"You were always so practical," she murmured.

"Because, you see, the place has been a little weedy lately, and as I am to be off again soon I wanted to leave it in order before I went."

"Hunting big game?" she suggested indifferently.

"Well—yes, rather. You see there's been a little scrapping in India on the frontier, and—well, I thought it would be rather jolly to have a shot at the little beggars myself. You see the regiment being at Aldershot a fellow hasn't got much to do, and so I have joined—temporarily, of course—a batch of men who are going out in September. Do you wish me luck?"

"Your occupations," said Muriel coldly, "always seem to me a little brutal." Then she glanced more kindly at him.

He was disconsolately grumbling, "Oh, I say now!" and cutting the heads off the nettles with his stick. They were nearing the church.

"Oh, I hope, Jack," she used the name with her old deliberate frankness, looking him in the eyes, steadily and kindly, "that you will have the best of luck. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you set to work again, and make something of all that's in you—all I know that's in you."

He beamed with pleasure, though he was still a little puzzled at her former sharpness. "It's awfully good of you, Miss Muriel," he said, opening the gate; "and you—you must know that if I am worth anything at all it's all owing to you. And now that you say you believe in me," he drew a long breath, "I think I could do anything—anything in the world to show you you're not mistaken."

Muriel said nothing. When they reached the porch she turned to him, and not looking at him said slowly, "I am quite sure I am not mistaken, Jack."

The church was cold and dark after the bright sunshine in the fields. In the church she remembered Gladys, and forgot to listen to the sermon. She and the doctor walked back together and quarrelled all the way.

It was that still, impossible hour of Sunday afternoon when the drowsiness of after lunch and the distance of five-o'clock tea combine to make inaction of one sort or another absolutely essential. Sir Arthur Dallerton, however, was uncomfortably wide awake. His protracted conversation with his charming guest contributed not a little to the unnatural keenness of his feelings, and with Sir Arthur Dallerton to feel keenly was to be in more or less of a bad temper. He saw Muriel out of his smoking-room window, and beckoned to her to come in.

"What are you doing, Muriel," he asked severely, "at this time of the afternoon?"

"Everybody is going out on the river after tea, so I was seeing about the boats," she said.

"That, Muriel, is the business of the gardener."

"I like minding the gardener's business," said Muriel smiling.

"My dear," said her uncle gravely, "If you would leave the gardener's business alone, and attend a little more to your own, I should be better pleased."

"What do you mean, uncle?" the girl asked, sitting down opposite him with her wide-open, unembarrassed eyes.

"Of course I know that it makes no difference to you what I wish—that I take for granted to begin with."

She moved her head impatiently; she hated the way he had of opening any discussion with injured personalities. He waited for a protest, and not hearing one he continued with increased vehemence.

"You are now twenty-seven. You have had plenty of opportunities to settle down in life. I have never attempted to force your hand——" A look in the girl's eyes suggested the prudence of this course. "I must say I have been uncommonly generous in overlooking your extraordinary schemes, but I never dreamed they excluded marriage. May I ask, Muriel—I think I have a right to know—if all my hopes are to be in vain simply through the obstinacy of an untrained, selfish girl? Do you, Muriel—I insist upon knowing this—intend to marry?"

"I am sorry you insist, uncle," said Muriel very quietly, though two bright spots of angry color burned in her cheeks, "because I am afraid I can give you no satisfactory answer to your hopes. It is very improbable—if you really wish to know—that I shall ever marry."

"What about Jack Hurstly?"

"I do not know to what you refer."

"I thought your objection to him was that he didn't stick to his profession. He's sticking to it fast enough now." Muriel winced. "And," he continued with more hope of success, "he'll probably get potted by a native, and then perhaps you'll be satisfied. You women who talk the most about cruelty are always the ones to send us poor devils to our graves."

"I have never had any objection to Jack Hurstly, and I have none now, but I certainly am not going to marry him. If he gets killed in India, as you thoughtfully suggested, it will perhaps prove to you that he is beyond your

matrimonial schemes. I do not believe anything else would," said Muriel, now thoroughly aroused. She looked lovely when she was angry: the gray eyes blazed and widened, the firm chin became inexorable, and her nostrils dilated like a spirited horse. Her uncle, who had an eye for beauty, appreciated her appearance, but was too vexed to remark on it.

"Gad! you have the temper of a devil!" he grumbled in reluctant admiration; "but if you won't have Jack Hurstly, you won't. And on the whole you might do better. What I want you thoroughly to understand is I'll have no monkey business with that young doctor. I didn't ask him down here, or you either, for any such purpose. If you had liked Jack Hurstly, well and good. I wouldn't have opposed the match. He's got blood, and he's got money, and I have nothing against him. But I have set my heart on one thing if you won't have him." He stopped a moment. "Muriel," he said, "you know my heart is weak, and it's very bad for me to be opposed."

Muriel smiled; the scene lost its strain; the gay voices of idlers on the lawn came in through the windows with the after-dinner grace of the "wise thrushes" in the shrubbery. They all sounded so restful and contented. But she—must she battle till her life's end? Tears of self-pity rose to her eyes. Her uncle supposed them to be signs of softening grace.

"My child," he said, "Sir Alec Bruce is a good man, and he loves you."

"He has a good income and a good family," suggested the girl maliciously.

Sir Arthur waved them aside grandly. "I have set my heart upon the match," said; "my life is risked by a disappointment."

Muriel crushed her hands together nervously. "And what about my life?" she said at last. "But I suppose that doesn't matter," and ignoring her uncle's wrathful exclamation she stepped out of the French windows and joined the idlers on the lawn. Sir Arthur waited a few moments for a heart attack to come on, but as nothing happened he also went into the garden. But a few moments had dissipated the group, and only Cynthia Grant remained with a bull-dog and a cigarette. She looked extremely unsympathetic, and grumbling under his breath something far from complimentary about advanced young women he returned to the house. A moment later Dr. Grant joined his sister on the lawn. The bull-dog, appropriately named "Grip," looked wistfully from one to the other. He knew it was impossible to be at the feet of both at the same time, and so with chivalrous courtesy he curled himself up once more by his mistress's side and listened with heavily absorbed eyes to the following conversation.

"Do you really mean to do it?" asked Cynthia curtly.

"If I hadn't, why should I have come here?" replied her brother, giving short puffs at his pipe. "You know I feel awfully out of this sort of thing—an abominably lazy lot." Grip, who with the magnificent patience of the strong had long been putting up with an inquisitive and infuriating fly, now relieved his feelings with a successful snap.

Cynthia laughed bitterly. "You won't get her so easily as that," she said by way of illustration. "And why should I want you to? Has it never occurred to you, my dear brother, that I might prefer you better unmarried. It's a slackening sort of thing at best for a man, and we've always roughed it together, haven't we, Geoff? Pretty cosily, too, I think."

"You might get married yourself," he said gloomily. The girl suggestively lit a cigarette.

"I don't think so, Geoff," she said with a queer little laugh. "Has it never occurred to you that I'm thirty, and you've never been particularly keen on it before?"

"I'm not now—but I think it's a good thing for a girl."

"You mean for a man, don't you?" He looked at her quietly.

"You're not like yourself to-day, Sis," he said gently. "What's wrong?"

"You're trying to marry Muriel Dallerton. She's in love with Jack Hurstly, whom she's trying to marry to that emotional little Gladys thing. Meanwhile, unless they are all very careful, Edith le Mentier means to play her own game with them all."

"How do you know Miss Dallerton's in love with Hurstly?" asked the doctor, savagely ignoring the rest of the remarks. She turned on him with mocking eyes.

"She is interested in his conversation," she said, and they both burst out laughing. Grip placed his head massively on her hands and looked both question and reproach at her. "His business, Grip," she said, "is to get perfectly rested, not to tread on lazy people's corns, and to see as much as possible of the right young lady. As for me, Grip"—she dropped some inconveniently heated ashes on his pink nose, which made him shake his head and blink severely like a shocked old lady—"where do I come in? Well, I have my own little game to play. And here's dear Edith in a fresh pink gown. Let's go and meet her—she's so fond of us both. And you——" she looked back with a whimsical tenderness at her brother, "just go down to the river and find your young lady, only for Heaven's sake don't glare at her like that!"

CHAPTER IX

"It is sometimes possible to say 'No,' but hard to live up to it."

MURIEL had not in the least intended to find herself alone with Jack Hurstly in a canoe. It all happened so naturally that protests and excuses were out of the question. She looked rather wistfully at Gladys in a larger boat, who was talking with nervous gaiety to Alec Bruce, while Mary Huntly in the stern looked on with serene approval. Gladys would not look at her friend, and something in the girl's manner and carriage seemed to denote an intense displeasure, which, after her confidence to Muriel, was not on the whole incomprehensible. Muriel sighed hopelessly. Circumstances, she thought, were against her, and Jack was with her; she might be stronger than the circumstances, but she had begun to feel that she was not as strong as Jack.

"I really have changed my life a bit," he went on, as if continuing their last conversation. "Do you know when you went to Stepney, and I got to know about all you were doing—how you gave those girls such a good time and helped them in their homes, and all that, you know—it made me feel what a cheap sort of thing the life of the fellows about town is, and how, after all, there isn't so very much in just having a good time if there's nothing else besides or beyond it. I hope you won't think I'm talking awful rot?" he interrupted himself nervously. She shook her head; she found it difficult to speak; her hand dipped in the water seemed to her a sort of illustration of how impossible it was to grasp her treasure even while it surrounded her. They were singing down the stream the air of a new opera, and that, and the trailing branches overhead, would have made a wonder of beauty if she had not loved Gladys. "Sacrifices lasted too long," she thought.

"And so," he continued, watching her with eager, earnest eyes as he talked, "while I was waiting for leave to go out to India I started a sort of club at home—among the tenants, you know. Nothing much of a place—only games and a room where the men can go and smoke and read their papers in the mornings. And it struck me that Miss Gladys' cousin—am I boring you?"

"No, Jack—Gladys' cousin?"

"That Parson Cyril Johnstone," he explained, "was really an awfully good sort, and might help me a bit with the men—on his own line, you know. And as the vicar wanted a curate, it seemed to fit in rather decently. I had no idea how awfully interesting that kind of thing could be. Why, now I know the men, and drop in to play a game of billiards with them, you couldn't believe how jolly they are with me; and many of them more decent, wholesome kind of men than one's own sort. I should so much like to show you the place, Muriel, and ask your advice about it. I'm afraid I'm an awfully poor hand at managing that kind of thing."

"Mr. Cyril Johnstone knows more about men's clubs than I do!" she replied with half-averted head. Jack smiled. He was not used to Muriel in this mood; it was more like other women whom he had been used to.

"You see," he said, "Cyril Johnstone is all very well in his way, but an unecclesiastical eye might be able to suggest more."

"I feel quite sure," said Muriel firmly, "that my eyes will be able to suggest nothing."

"They must have changed then a good deal in the last few minutes," said Jack coolly; "they have always suggested plenty to me." Muriel looked up desperately, and saw Dr. Grant on the bank.

"Row to the shore, please, Jack," she said, "there is room for the doctor." Jack set his lips together firmly. He had no intention of rowing to the shore for any such purpose.

"Sorry," he said; "I'm afraid it's impossible."

"I must insist," she replied coldly.

"Please don't, for I hate to disobey your wishes," he pleaded.

"You overlook the alternative," cried Muriel.

"Muriel," he said, "you don't really mean it—I know you don't wish it!" He knew this would have been fatal with another woman, but he counted on her sincerity. She looked from him to the shore, and back again to the softly shaded water.

"I must ask you to do it just the same," she said finally. He turned the boat into mid-stream, and they floated awhile in silence.

"It is the first time I have ever refused to do what you wanted," he said at last, drawing a deep breath.

"It is the last time I shall ever give you an opportunity," said Muriel coldly. But if she had hoped to prevent further words her hope was in vain.

"You told me once that you cared for me, Muriel, but that I wasn't worth marrying. I have tried to make myself a bit more so, and now you are not

going to tell me, are you, that you have changed your mind?" She faced him steadily.

"I can't marry you," she said. "Please don't ask me questions, Jack."

"But I must," he said frowning. "Why can't you marry me?" She was silent. "You don't love me?"

"Perhaps I never did."

"Nonsense, dear, you're not that sort. Tell me the truth—you do love me?" Muriel turned in exasperation.

"Oh, yes, then, if you *will* have it. I *do* love you, but I'm not now or at any other time ever going to marry you!"

They had forgotten the other boat and the river. A burst of merry laughter awoke them to the fact that they had drifted on a snag, and that the rest of the party had been watching them for the last few minutes from the opposite bank.

It was the doctor after all who rowed out to their assistance and took Muriel home after tea across the fields. Muriel was desperate. Jack had found means to say to her that he did not in the least believe her, and that he was not going to give her up. Gladys had found means of very pointedly, though with exquisite intangibility, expressing a state of mind anything but pleasant to her friend. The constant flow of bright, good-natured chaff, the utterly superficial, pleasant brightness of the boating party, gave Muriel a feeling of weariness and age. She felt glad to be with the doctor. He at least left her alone and seemed contented to talk or to be silent in an easy, effortless way. Perhaps it was because in his profession a man "learns to do his watching without its showing pain." He talked chiefly about his sister, and when they got home advised her in an off-hand manner "to go and lie down."

"But I am not tired," she cried, half vexed.

"No," he replied soothingly; "still you know it's a warm afternoon; you would find it restful." Muriel smiled submissively.

"To tell the truth," she said, "I think perhaps I am a bit tired," and she went upstairs.

An hour afterwards there came a soft knock at the door and Cynthia Grant came in.

"They told me you had a headache," she said apologetically, "and I came to see if I could do anything for you."

"It's very kind of you," said Muriel gratefully; "but do come and sit down. My headache was only an excuse for laziness, and it would do it good

to be talked to."

Cynthia sat down near the sofa, and after a little conversation on general subjects, began in abrupt, curt tones to tell Muriel the story of her life.

Why she told it, it would be impossible to tell, except that she wished to approach nearer to the girl who had won her brother's love, and that such a confidence was the most painful sacrifice it was in her power to make. It was a strange story of how she and her brother had studied together side by side for their degree; of how she had advanced even farther than he, till at length, finding she was outstripping him, in one magnificent burst of sacrifice she had thrown the whole thing up; but how the fascination of her work proved almost too much for her, till in desperation she left her brother altogether, and went to the Paris studios to study art. Here she paused awhile as if reluctant to speak further. "You don't know," she said, "what it was to have lived as I did, almost as a man among men. It was only we two—my brother and I—against the world, you know, and it's a hard world. After I left him—I'm not going to tell you the whole story—there was a man who was a very fine fellow, an Englishman and an artist, and he fell in love with me before he quite knew—well, all the incidents of my life. Paris is rather a place for incidents, you know. He wanted to marry me. But, of course, I told him—and, I daresay, it wasn't an ideal story. At any rate he told me he could not make me his wife, and I care far too much for him to be satisfied with anything else. So I went back to my brother, and I have been with him ever since. I help him with his cases, and, as his practice is rather large, and contains a good many poor people, I find enough to do. Are you horribly shocked, Miss Dallerton?"

"Have you given up your art?" said Muriel. The other girl went to the window. She laughed nervously.

"Art?" she said. "I never look at a picture if I can help it."

"And does your brother know?"

"Everything; but it has made no difference."

"I wonder why you told me?" said Muriel thoughtfully. Cynthia smiled.

"You look as if people were in the habit of telling you things. Besides—I don't know—it seemed to me as if you ought to know the truth if we were to be friends."

"I hope we shall be," said Muriel softly—"I hope very much we shall be."

"I think," said Cynthia as she went to the door, "that if I had known you, it might have been different."

Muriel puzzled thoughtfully awhile over the rather grim pair she had come into contact with. She had known very little of that great wide world of professional life. Society and the slums, though they were a great contrast, were not, she thought, so great a mystery. But though Muriel was distinctly broad-minded for a woman, it was impossible for her just at present to absorb herself in abstract problems when her own life presented such pressing personal ones. Her first misery at Gladys' jealousy and misunderstanding seemed gone. To her surprise she had begun to feel almost a sense of relief. If she didn't understand, it was plain there was not so very much to worry about. If one looks for too many things in one place, the few things one finds lose their significance. It is not one's love so much that gets dulled as one's sense of importance. The halo of expectation fails; next time one's eagerness goes with slower feet, and is positively astonished if it ever gets met at all. So that now Muriel felt she had simply over-estimated both her friends' characters and affection, and that nothing therefore remained but to clearly make Gladys see she did not intend to marry Jack Hurstly. Her responsibility ended there she told herself, after that she need not try to keep up this very unequal friendship any more. As for Cynthia Grant, she was a woman and old enough to know what to take for granted, and how not to be exacting.

CHAPTER X

"O Heart! O blood that freezes! blood that burns!
Earth's returns for whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin:
Shut them in; with their triumphs and the glories and the
rest—
Love is best!"

—Robert Browning.

Very firm and self-reliant natures make sometimes the natural mistake of under-estimating the power of passion. Their full self-control and constant watchfulness ignore the possibility of the strange touch of sudden lawlessness—the betrayal of the blood. That one could be one moment standing reason-bound, content, a soul at peace, and in another swept over the verge of thought into a sea of feeling, was absurd to Muriel. Yet the swift flash takes place: the world, like a curtain, rolls up, and all the conventions, the safeguards, the stationary landscapes, disappear! It was such a moment which took possession of her the very night that she had decided to give her lover to another woman. The evening had passed pleasantly, and the still glory of the summer night drew the party out into the dusk of the garden. Muriel slipped away from the rest and wandered into a little wilderness some distance from the house, wondering how best to carry out her plans, when suddenly all the blood in her body rushed to her heart, for there beside her stood the man she loved. It had been possible for her in the calm of loneliness and heartache to dispose of Jack, but now—the moon's gold and silver gliding through the clouds; the thrushes calling heart to heart their breathless rapture in a liquid continuity of song; all the passion and the pain rushing into beauty, thrilled and throbbing with the heart of night—it was difficult to resist now. And the stars, how they shone down on love, each one a light struck from the royal conquest of their queen, the moon! They were enwrapped in that dream so boundless and so limited which for one breathless moment holds all the world can teach, and then scatters and breaks into the hundred lesser lights of life. A sigh broke the charm, and Muriel, wondering, withdrew herself from his arms, abashed and yet elated at her defeat, so much more sweet than any of the triumphs life had held for her.

"Now," said Jack, smiling down at her, "are you going to tell me that you don't care?"

"I am afraid," said Muriel, "that it would not be very convincing if I did. It seems to me," she added breathlessly, "as if before I had been living only on the outskirts of life. I did not know it was like that!" She looked at him wistfully, and asked humbly, "Is it quite right, Jack, do you think?"

"What, my dearest?"

"To forget everything; to see nothing but the world a background, and that one great avowal drowning all the rest?"

"I think it must be," said Jack. "Just because it's so powerful it must be meant to be good—in itself, you know—only some of us poor chaps don't know how to use it."

Muriel shivered a little; there was dampness in the air; the trees seemed to quiver. She remembered Liz and the squalid scenes where the power which meant heaven to her had meant darkness and life-long misery to the other woman. Had she gained the world only to lose it? Jack wrapped her shawl tenderly over her shoulders.

"You must go in, little woman," he said practically. "Now you're mine you shan't run any risks, not even summer ones. Shall I speak to your uncle?" he asked her as they neared the little artificial lights of the house.

"Not yet," she whispered hoarsely, with a terrible fear in her eyes. Jack followed her glance. It rested on a young girl's face. Gladys was standing close at the French window looking out into the night—desperate, wild, despairing.

"There's something wrong with the child," Muriel said quick to Jack—"bad news from home, I think," for even at that moment she knew she must keep the other woman's secret. "Let me go to her, darling—good-night! It's awful, isn't it," she said, "to be so selfish and so happy!"

She caught her hand from him, hurrying into the house. "It's wicked, it's wicked," she murmured, "to be happy at all."

Gladys called out over the approaching figure, "There is a letter for Captain Hurstly!" He came unwillingly forward into the light about the window. Muriel stood now with her hand in the girl's looking back at him. Gladys herself seemed unaware of the touch. She was smiling painfully; the "On Her Majesty's Service" seemed to demand attention.

Jack opened it, read it, glanced for a moment to Muriel, and placed it in his pocket.

"What does it say?" said Gladys, and Jack, so absorbed by its purpose and the strangeness of the scene, never knew till afterwards that it was not Muriel who had spoken. He tried to make light of it.

"Oh, I'm called off sooner than I expected."

"When?" They both spoke at once this time. Again he only heard Muriel.

"The fact is—well, to-night," he owned unsteadily. Gladys stepped quickly forward; a little quivering light shone in her eyes; she caught her breath and half unconsciously held out her hands.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Captain Hurstly!" she cried; "and I wish you—I wish you the very best luck in the world." He looked towards Muriel, but she was gone. He met the girl's eyes again. His own felt unaccountably misty. Muriel was gone, and this little thing was wishing him the very best luck in the world. He pressed her hands gratefully.

"Thank you, thank you awfully," he murmured. "I think I've got it to-night——"

"Oh, where's that tiresome Jack Hurstly?" cried a voice from the window. "I left him my fan to take care of, and——"

"I've got it here, Mrs. le Mentier," cried Jack hastily, stepping through the low French window with the missing fan in his hand.

When he drove off an hour later to catch the midnight train it was Edith le Mentier who, side by side with Muriel, stood at the door to see him off. Looking back he saw that it was with her he had left "the very best luck in the world." He had quite forgotten all about Gladys. From her window she watched him go on fire with love and happiness. His last words rang in her ears. She never doubted that they were meant for her. He had no time to say more then; but when he came back, not Muriel in all her beauty, nor any other woman, nor any other thing could ever come between them again she thought. And he would come back! The moonlight and the soft fragrance of the dusky night, what were they any of them but the earth's pledges to her that her heaven should come again to meet that other heaven in her heart?

"I have broken my fan," said Edith le Mentier to Muriel as they went up to bed. "So stupid of me, wasn't it; but at any rate I was not going to let Captain Hurstly have another one." Muriel looked straight before her.

"Another one, Edith?" she repeated.

"Yes, stupid, didn't you know men were in the habit of keeping people's fans when they were—well, rather—don't you know?"

"I am afraid I'm rather dense—good-night," said Muriel wearily. She stopped outside Gladys' door, but there was no light or sound. "She's

asleep," she thought, "I won't disturb her," and went on to her own room. It seemed rather strange to her that anybody could sleep.

CHAPTER XI

"My Faith?—
Which Religion I profess?—
None of which I mention make.
Wherefore so? And can't you guess?—
For Religion's sake."
—GEORGE MACDONALD.

THE morning brought counsel to Muriel. She would say nothing. Jack would not return for a year or two, and in the meantime Gladys' passionate little heart might have turned elsewhere, or in any case the quick pain of certainty be less. For herself she turned her eager mind anew to the work before her. Love acted as a spur upon the discipline of her life; it made the dark places plainer, and lit up with light and hope the saddest mysteries. She was one of those few souls in whom experiences can never conflict or stand in opposition to each other. She knit them link by link into a chain binding her closer and higher towards her ideals. She never thought much about her difficulties until she came up to them, but when she once faced them they helped her afterwards. Edith le Mentier's delicate insinuation she had felt a passing disgust at, and had straightway brushed aside. Jealousy and suspicion need darkness and a closed-up room; all Muriel's rooms were open to the sky and bright with sunshine. Nevertheless when she looked at Edith le Mentier she felt an uneasiness she could not account for.

The party broke up the next morning. The doctor and his sister returned to town, while the others went to various other country houses, Muriel and her uncle going to Scotland for the remainder of her holiday. She was impatient to go back to her work, and the month passed in making arrangements and re-arrangements all involving voluminous correspondence. She wrote to Cyril Johnstone about Captain Hurstly's club work, and as it was under parochial guidance, and various ritual stipulations of the young man's were agreed to by the open-minded, slightly lax old vicar, he was soon settled in deeply earnest and energetic work such as the slow old parish had never seen before. Yet, as Muriel soon saw, the example of his stern habits and indefatigable labor bore much fruit of admiration and respect, though scarcely that imitation which the zealous young priest expected the doctrines he would have died for to bring forth. He was not

satisfied with Muriel's generous explanation. "It's your doctrines that have made you, and if the people accept you, surely they are on the way to accept the doctrines?" She returned a week earlier than her uncle wished her to, to encourage Jack's "Parson," though she wrote to Jack that "your young priest doesn't at all approve of me. He considers me a shallow society woman with a club craze, and shakes his head over my unaccountable friendship with you. He gave me splendid advice the other day, and I'm afraid I lost my temper with him, but the gravity with which he regarded me as he said, 'My dear young lady, I am not speaking to you as a mere man, but from my priestly office,' restored my sense of humor. . . . But no, Jack, I have a reason for wishing our engagement private. If it were any feeling of my own I would tell you, as it is you must take it on trust as you do me. Did you ever know Mrs. le Mentier very well?"

Muriel wrote the last sentence and then crossed it out. He might think —— Besides, it was so absurd. She felt angry with herself for having crossed it out—it was so unimportant. She was surprised that night by a letter from Cynthia Grant, who had passed out of her mind with the press of duty and pleasure and life. Now, however, she awoke to a vigorous interest.

> "You will be surprised at what I am going to ask," the letter ran, "but I hope that won't shake you into the negative attitude that it does some people. I'm not going to tell you that I have any 'religious views' (and you will excuse me if I say that with most people they are little more—and distant views at that), because I haven't; only it happens to please me to work, and I like you, consequently if you see any opening for a capable woman doctor who can give free 'instruction' to young women and practical help as well, let me know and I'll come to you. My brother approves of my plan, and is going to get an assistant.
>
> "Yours,
>
> "Cynthia Grant, M.D.
>
> "*P.S.*—I am particularly anxious for interesting tumors."

Muriel thought for a moment, then laughed, and wired back: "Please come, plenty of interesting tumors."

It was the first day of October before the two women settled to work. Life opened before them full, arduous, engrossing. Around them in teeming factories and crowded dust-yards lived the people into whose lives their own brought knowledge, health, horizon. Year after year these sordid lives go on, working until dead-tired they stumble home and stand an hour or two in the

close streets full of the dangers and temptations of the city; the holidays' rough carnivals of over-feeding and drinking. Death, disease and sin the only breaks in the grim monotony of passing years, and now slowly and gradually the change was taking place. From their work the young people streamed into the clubs, and were taught little by little lessons of life, courtesy, truthfulness, honesty; and these not by confronting them with strange virtues, but in developing their own, generosity, kindliness and the marvellous quality of "straightness," the shield of so many of the poor. Men found billiards and other games, even cards, though gambling was not allowed; they could pass their evenings in social good fellowship without spending their wages or staggering home drunk. Their wives, too, in another part were not less well cared for, and their sons and daughters, kept out of the streets four or five nights out of the seven, were all the more inclined to stay at home on the other two. More than all this, living among them and sharing all they suffered was a "lidy," who if she had chosen need never have done a stroke of work, or given a thought to anything but pleasure and ease and beauty. Though some of the more hardened jeered at her for her sacrifice, the greater part were drawn in generous animation and gratitude into the work, and even those who jeered left her alone and would have fought any who tried to do her an injury.

"You only touch the fringe," Cynthia said to her one day. "So what's the use? When you die it will all sink back again!"

"Do you know," said Muriel smiling, "I believe there is healing in the very hem of His garment, and that all these children in whom we start a larger life will in time permeate the apathetic multitude. As for ourselves, don't doubt that when we die the work will not go on. Truly I should be very despairing if I dreamed that such tremendous purposes rested on my shoulders. We just fit in here, that's all, and make the room larger for the next comer!"

"Humph!" said Cynthia dryly; "after I'd made the room larger, I should prefer sitting in it myself."

"Nonsense," laughed Muriel; "you would go on to make an addition to the house!"

"My brother comes here to-night," Cynthia stated abruptly. "He's going to bring a magic lantern for the men, and show them some of his Chinese slides."

"I'm so glad," said Muriel gratefully.

"Do you like him?" Cynthia asked.

"Like your brother? Of course, very much."

“So little as that?” cried Cynthia laughing wistfully. “Oh, Muriel, Muriel!” Muriel colored and frowned. It was a subject that visibly annoyed her, and which she tried to ignore. Dr. Grant had been very kind to the club. She had tried to believe he was interested in the work; it was a little baffling to find it hinted that it might be the worker. Cynthia watched her carefully. “Is there nothing besides the work?” she thought to herself. She introduced the subject of a meal, and Muriel laughingly discovered she had forgotten her lunch.

“You were writing letters at lunch time, weren’t you?” suggested Cynthia.

CHAPTER XII

"Mercy every way
Is infinite—and who can say?"

THERE was a high west wind, and the dust swirled in clouds at the street corners. It was the kind of wind that never lets one alone, and is constantly drawing attention to the inconveniences of one's clothing. The clouds were the dull brown of approaching rain, drifting in rags across the chilly sky. Cynthia Grant, who had been all the night before and half the day through fighting over the undesirable life of a mother and child, felt almost aggrieved that she had saved them both. "What did I want to do it for? The whole system's rotten! Why should it be considered mercy to prolong the agony instead of cutting it short? I don't care for the woman; I hate the child; and, even if I liked them both, I don't think their lives worth living. Why that drunken brute of a husband, who is always throwing chairs at the poor thing, should say 'Thank God!' when I told him she'd live is a puzzle; he could easily have got some one fresh to throw chairs at, and the brat is only one mouth more to feed! I feel far more sympathy for that woman with ten children who told me she had had 'no churchyard luck'." She chuckled grimly to herself, and looked with a tolerant, amused gaze at the narrow alley, with its children at play in the gutters, wizened and old, with sharp, cruel, degraded little faces, slatternly women at doors, and skulking forms, that were scarcely human, lurking in corners and in the wretched rooms that were called "living," a phrase more applicable to the vermin that inhabited them than the half-human creatures that sprawled there. It was a bad alley, and the tough knotted stick in Cynthia's hand did not look out of place.

"Yes," she thought to herself, "Muriel must be impelled by some pretty desperate attraction to give up her life to this sort of thing. It will make her old before her time. And as for the people here, her influence will probably cease as most influence does with her presence, and trickle off them as easily as water off a duck's back. As for me, I suppose I might as well be *here* as anywhere else—now."

She looked at the sky and wondered what poets saw in it. It suggested to her nothing but the need of a broom. She was tired out when she reached rooms over the club, and glad of the tea Muriel had prepared for her.

Muriel could not stay, for it was the time when her girls came out of the factory, and she must be ready to meet them. She was in one of her merriest and brightest moods. The gloom of the outside world could not touch her; even the sordid misery of the streets she had visited that afternoon only seemed to her vistas of future sunshine. She believed in no sympathy that stopped at sorrow; but it was because she believed so deeply in the reality of sorrow that she knew the certainty of joy.

"What makes you so happy?" said Cynthia wistfully; "I see nothing to cause it." Muriel wrinkled her eyebrows as she always did when puzzled. Geoff called it her "frowning for a vision," and compared it to a sailor's whistling for a wind. At last the partial vision came.

"I don't see why it should be so difficult to be happy," she said. "All that one hasn't got is bound to come some day; all that one truly *has* will never go. And when one is quite sure of that oneself, it is beautiful to be able to encourage one's bit of the world to go on waiting for *their* bright side. And how good and bright and dear things really are if we only come to look through them, and don't make *culs-de-sac* of sorrows. If love is the key of the world, joy is the hand that turns it, I feel sure. To make a creed of joy and a fact of love is to win half the battles, and be ready to fight the other half. But you know all this just as well as I do, and practise it far better—so what's the use of talking? Simple things become mysteries directly you try to explain them. Mind you rest and sleep. I'll be back for supper," and she disappeared. It grew dark in the room afterwards.

CHAPTER XIII

"This world's judgment cries 'Consequences,' and leaves it
to a higher court to take account of Aims."

It was decided that one more effort should be made to rescue Muriel Dallerton.

Mary Huntly, persuaded by her husband, wrote asking her for two days early in the season.

Cynthia peremptorily ordered her to go, and she went.

The weather in the opening charm of June would to most people have been better spent in the country; only London lovers felt the greater charm of the full, bright season set in the green freshness of the Park.

There was a ball the first night, and Muriel danced in a dream of delight at the old easy ways, and all the beauties of sight and sound and sense. Gladys was away on a visit, so the return to civilization was marked by no jar of severed friendship.

A day spent on the river with one of those groups, where each one knows his neighbor well enough for associations to make past pleasures present ones, and yet not too deeply to be able to play lightly on the surface of personalities, made Muriel thirsty for more. It is true that there were strained relationships even there, though hidden with a cultivated ease; but she refused to see them, and let herself be soothed into a fairyland of fancies.

Mary had arranged as a climax a tea-party in the gardens.

"Of course," she said apologetically, "one knows they aren't private, but it's the best place in the world to wander, if only on that account. Wandering I always think the chief charm of tea out-of-doors; it's a compensation for one's hair being blown about and the butter melting."

"It all depends on having the right person to wander with," suggested her companion.

"Well, but what are all our social efforts but an attempt to find the right person—and then wander?" laughed Mrs. Huntly. "It's the magic lottery that makes London seasons, and keeps up house-parties——"

"And finally limits one to a wedding ring," interrupted one of the group.

"Or charms one away from the limits!" ventured a daring young man to Muriel. She felt vaguely uncomfortable, these children of light played so near the brink of things.

"I don't think I quite know what you mean," she said gravely.

"He doesn't mean anything," said Mary Huntly shortly. The young man turned to someone with whom he needn't explain. Muriel wondered whether she would enjoy wandering in the gardens. "At any rate I shall not have the right person," she thought.

When the afternoon came the overpowering youthfulness of spring danced in her veins, and made it easy for the unpleasant to pass from her mind. She was with a little group who had not yet separated to wander, when she saw a woman whom she had known crossing the grass at a little distance from where they sat.

"Why, there is Sally Covering," she cried. "It seems years since I have seen her!" There was a moment's awkward silence. Muriel looked in astonishment from one to the other. They all began to talk in the way of people who wish to ignore an impossible moment. Alec Bruce, who was one of the party, asked her an irrelevant question, but she brushed it aside.

"I am going to speak to her," she said.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Alec. They spoke rapidly, and Muriel felt the color rush to her face. She felt annoyed with herself for speaking at all; but now that she had spoken she would not be a coward, so she walked the intervening space, and came up with the woman.

"Mrs. Covering! you haven't forgotten me?" she cried. The woman started at the sound of her name, and turned sharply. She was painted more than a little, and inartistically. She gave a queer little laugh as she took Muriel's outstretched hand.

"Dear me, no!" she said; "I am not the one who forgets, Miss Dallerton." Muriel held her hand and looked into her eyes.

"I suppose you will think me very rude to stop you like this!" she said; "but I should like so much to talk to you a few moments, if you are not engaged."

Mrs. Covering withdrew her hand. She was embarrassed, puzzled, and a trifle defiant.

"I cannot think what you wish to say to me, Miss Dallerton," she answered; "but I am quite at your disposal for the next few minutes."

They walked together in silence for a moment, Muriel searching for the right word. She remembered the woman's story now. She had left her

husband, and made what the set she lived in called the "dreadful break." Muriel could not quite remember with whom; but people did not talk to her much about that kind of thing, and she had only heard the outlines of the story. What Muriel finally did say was not in the least what Mrs. Covering expected.

"You have never been to see me," she said, "in my new home."

"Oh! I don't see people now," said Mrs. Covering, with some bitterness; "I have got out of the habit."

"Mrs. Covering," said Muriel, "I should like to be able to contradict a report about you. Will you give me leave?" Mrs. Covering made an attempt to remain defiant.

"Really, Miss Dallerton," she began, "I cannot conceive——" But as she looked at the girl's honest, tender eyes her lips quivered. "It's no use," she said. "Please let us say good-bye here. It was very good of you to speak to me."

"But it isn't true?" said Muriel. Mrs. Covering looked back to where through the trees her old acquaintances in ostentatious conversation pretended not to be watching them.

"Well, anyway," she said, "I was honest enough to leave my husband; if I hadn't I might be over there now with your friends." Muriel took her hand. She knew that sometimes the human touch does more than the work of words.

"Will you come to me?" she said. "Will you promise to come to me when you want help? That you will want help I feel sure; for you are sad already, and you can't help being more sad. Only don't get desperate. Come to me, and we will find some way out of it together!"

"I'm not sad!" said Mrs. Covering quickly. "I don't see why you should think so. I'm happy—absolutely happy! Can't you see how happy I am?" She bit her lip to keep it from quivering. "And as for there being an end—Oh, Miss Dallerton, there isn't an *end* for a woman like me, there's only—a new beginning!"

"And that you will try with me?" said Muriel with an insistence that she herself could scarcely understand.

"The ten minutes are up," said Mrs. Covering trying hard to smile, "and I have an appointment. If it is ever possible I will come to you, Miss Dallerton—at any rate I shall never forget that you asked me. But I do not think I shall come."

She walked quickly away, and Muriel watched her in silence. She remembered that people had said Sally Covering was the best-dressed woman in London. She was still—for it is rarely that the little things change. We don't forget to put on gloves because our heart is broken. Muriel felt a passion to be alone. Alone in this world of green, robbed for the moment of its fresh beauty; alone to face the problem that rose in inexorable, dark power in society as well as in the slums—the problem which seems ever the same unrelenting enemy of joy and health and the beauty of life, and attacked the vital principles of all she believed in and hoped for. It was very difficult to go back to the group of merry idlers, dancing like butterflies over a precipice—butterflies intent on hiding from the unwary that there *is* a precipice.

The buzz of talk increased as she drew near them. One lady put up her lorgnette and looked at her as if she were some new invention, and then turning said in a perfectly audible voice: "The paragon of virtue approaches, but I don't see the lost sheep!" The group dispersed and left Muriel for a moment with her hostess.

"Oh, Muriel, how *could* you do such a thing?" wailed Mary Huntly. "People must draw a line somewhere, you know. They may swallow the slums, but for *you*—before their very eyes——"

"To speak to an old friend," said Muriel quietly. "Mary, you can't blame me. It's terrible! terrible! But just because it is, one can't let it pass!" Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"It's hopeless to argue with you, child," she said. "Yet even you must see that if people *will* do such things, they must be ignored for the sake of society at large."

"Society at large," said Muriel bitterly, "which has caused the trouble, must protect itself from its own victims, I understand, Mary."

"But what would you have one do?" said Mary Huntly. "What good did your speaking to her do?"

"It showed her that one cared," said Muriel. "Too late, I am afraid, in her case. But one must give them a chance to come back, or at least see where they have gone, and wake them up to the horror of it! If you leave them to wake up too late for themselves, they will only fall into a deeper horror!"

"A woman of that sort," said Mrs. Huntly "is incorrigible—simply incorrigible, Muriel."

"Oh, Mary, you don't mean that, I know. If it was some one you loved you would try to help her!"

Mrs. Huntly turned with relief to welcome Dr. Grant. There was a positive pleasure in her greeting. It put an end to an unpleasant situation. The only thing in life that Mrs. Huntly was afraid of was an unpleasant situation.

"Here's your doctor, child," she said in an undertone; "do go and wander." Muriel accepted the proposition almost willingly.

Geoff looked this afternoon so strong and unconventional—not even a frock-coat could make a man-about-town out of him. Not that he in the least answered her problem. He would probably have refused to discuss it with her, and would certainly have disagreed with her in his conclusions; and yet there was something in the strong, sound spirit of the man infinitely refreshing to her after the cruel butterflies.

It was with a new sense of trust and confidence in him that she wandered in the gardens. She realized at last that the parting of the ways had come between her old friends and her new life. Before she had been happy with them because her eyes were shut, now she saw beneath all that seemed gay and delightful a horror of selfishness, hardness and wrong.

Mrs. Covering never came to her; but whenever she felt a longing to return to the old life the thought of her face and the knowledge of what the day's wanderings had shown her came back with the same bitterness.

She knew that the man with whom Mrs. Covering had made "the dreadful break" would soon be received back into society again.

Mothers with marriageable daughters do not ask too many questions if the woman disappears—and the woman always disappears.

There were times when Muriel almost envied Mary her faith in the incorrigible—it relieved her of so much responsibility.

CHAPTER XIV

"Saints to do us good
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:
We never find them saints before at least."

"REALLY, Gladys," said Mary Huntly firmly, "I think you should give some reason for the way you are behaving. I don't want to bother you, but there was my own brother, Cyril——"

"What's the use of fast-days and a cope, Mary? I should give him beefsteaks on Fridays and sausages for vigils, and he would apply for a separation. Besides, I don't care for him."

"There is still Alec Bruce," said Mary Huntly slowly. "He would let you have your own way in everything, and never remember a fast from one year's end to another. Muriel Dallerton was engaged to him once years ago, before she met Captain Hurstly. It was her fault entirely that it was broken off, she was so down on him. By the way, what has become of your friendship for Muriel?" Gladys shrugged her shoulders.

"Fancy marrying a man who would let you have your own way in everything. I should be bored to death. No, Mary, I am only twenty, and I really will marry somebody sometime I promise you."

She ignored the question about Muriel and got up idly to look at the paper. After a few minutes it fell on her lap, and she gazed with wide-open eyes straight in front of her. In print, so that all the world could see, ran an announcement of a severe hunting accident to Captain Hurstly of the ——, with the addition that Miss Dallerton, his *fiancée*, and her uncle were soon to be on their way out to India to join him. It was thought probable that in the event of Captain Hurstly's recovery the young couple would be married out there. Gladys watched with fascinated gaze the skilful movements of the footmen removing tea. She never forgot the delicate traced pattern on the cloth, or the two muffins and a half. She carefully counted and wondered, with an interest out of proportion to its subject, what would eventually be their fate. It did not surprise her that Edith le Mentier should be announced, and she found herself smiling quite naturally at that lady's little graceful poses, when suddenly she heard herself addressed by name.

"Have you heard of Muriel Dallerton's great *coup*? My dear child, you really should go in for slum clubs—they're so taking. I should do it myself if I could ever think of anything to say to those kind of creatures. And then one finds out that she's been all the time engaged to Jack Hurstly, and is actually going out to India to nurse him through an accident and pull him safely into the bonds of matrimony. If I were a yellow journalist I could make the most touching headlines for it—'Death or Marriage?' 'If he survives the first accident, will he survive the second?' etc." Gladys laughed.

"But, Mrs. le Mentier," she said, "perhaps it's not so inevitable as all that. Mary was telling me she had been engaged before." There was a moment's silence. Mrs. Huntly looked sharply across at her friend, and Edith subdued a smile. She could not resist, however, a little shot.

"Once upon a time there was a naughty boy," she said, "so Muriel put him in the corner, and he ran away. Isn't that true, Mary?" The door opened and two maiden ladies, who were very charitable and rather plain, took up Mrs. Huntly's attention. Gladys drew Edith to the window.

"Is Captain Hurstly a good boy?" she said, smiling. Edith looked down at her caressingly.

"One's always good if one isn't found out," she said.

"But if one is found out, one is much worse," persisted Gladys.

"I don't think Muriel ever cared for Alec Bruce," said Mrs. le Mentier. "Why, don't you wish her to marry Jack?" she added, glancing at the girl tenderly.

"I'm so sorry for the doctor," smiled Gladys.

"If Muriel knew," Gladys continued, "that he was not such a good boy, she would be certain to put him in the corner even longer, because she does care for him."

"If she sees him now while he's ill she'll give in. We all do when Nature takes it into her head to punish," mused Mrs. le Mentier.

"Then if she knew soon, she wouldn't go?" asked Gladys. "I'm going to see her to-morrow," she added.

"Dear Muriel," said Mrs. le Mentier.

"Shall I take her any message from you?" Gladys questioned.

"I think," said Mrs. le Mentier, "that I must go myself to wish her *bon voyage*."

Mrs. le Mentier went home and arranged two little packets of letters—letters that might have been burned, that ought to have been burned, only that some women have the fatal habit of holding on to the wrong things.

Gladys went upstairs and cried, and hated herself, and bathed her eyes, and hated Muriel more.

Meanwhile, quite unconsciously, Muriel packed her trunk and gave last directions to Cynthia about the club and its management in her absence, and in her heart she prayed, "O God, let him live—let him live."

And Jack Hurstly fought with death and heat and India through long hours of breathless night.

The boat did not sail until evening, and as Muriel parted from Cynthia Grant to go on to her uncle's on a cold, chilly November morning a hansom drove to the door, and Gladys, deeply veiled, sprang out. She greeted Muriel with her old tender affection. In a minute or more they were rattling away through the dim streets together.

"I can't understand," said Gladys at last, "what it all means. You cannot be breaking your word to me—you cannot. I have trusted you so. But I have waited so long for an explanation, and it has never come, and now you are going to him." Muriel looked steadily at her companion with unfaltering, sad eyes.

"I made a terrible mistake," she said gently. "For a while I thought it in my power to give to you that which can't be transferred. But why should we talk of this now?—even while we speak he may have passed beyond it all!" Gladys wrung her hands together desperately.

"He is mine," she muttered—"mine—and I shall never see his face again!" Then suddenly she controlled herself. "You have broken your word?" she asked.

"I have," said Muriel.

"Do you expect a marriage founded on broken promises to prosper?"

"Hush! he may be dead," said Muriel.

The hansom drove up to the door; the two girls looked at each other; Gladys did not get out, but as Muriel moved towards the house she leaned out of the window. "I pray to God he is dead," she said quietly, then she gave the address to the cabman. She left a card at Mrs. le Mentier's door: "Muriel is with her uncle—they go to-night."

CHAPTER XV

"Have you no assurance that, earth at end;
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall mend
In that higher sphere to which yearnings tend."

"I HOPE, my dear," said Mrs. le Mentier, "that I am not too frightfully out of place. But the fog drove me to you—it positively did. Mystery is so more-ish, and you know how dreadfully curious I am. When were you first engaged to Jack, dear?" Muriel smiled.

"I don't know, truly," she said, "for it feels now as if it was always."

"Then it must have been very recent. Recent things always feel like that," said Edith. She sank down before the fire and began to warm her hands; the rings on them gleamed and glittered with an almost malicious sparkling. "It is very brave of you to marry Jack," she murmured, smiling —"very brave. I hardly think I should have had the pluck to if I were single again."

Muriel looked in front of her. She was counting the minutes; every one seemed a slow, aching century separating her from the man who might be dying. It was a refined mode of torture to have to talk of him. She began to understand the feeling of a caged wild beast. As an expression it is trite, but as an emotion it possessed her as original.

"You are not very consistent, are you?" suggested Mrs. le Mentier with a little hard laugh. "We none of us are, I suppose; only it's rather disappointing to us wicked ones when one of the saints back down. Being so deficient ourselves we expect so much more of them. It's the shock that one feels when a really good cook fails in his favorite dish."

"I'm afraid I'm not consistent, and I'm sure I'm not one of the saints," said Muriel with a little strained smile. "What do you mean, Mrs. le Mentier?"

"Once on a time," replied her companion critically, regarding her dainty hands, "there was a girl who wouldn't marry a man—there's nothing so very astonishing about that, you'll say; it's happened before and it may happen again. But she wouldn't marry him because she found out that his record showed a stumble or two. One may consider her a little fastidious, but one respects her. The man behaved very nicely; he respected her too. But then

there came another man, and human nature made her forget all about his record, which, when you come to think of it, is very natural, and not at all to be blamed. It is a pity to be too fastidious, but one can't perhaps respect her as much."

"Mrs. le Mentier," said Muriel, rising to her feet, "will you kindly tell me what you mean?" Mrs. le Mentier slowly began to draw on her gloves—they fitted her to perfection—but she remained seated.

"You might ask Jack when you see him—if he is well enough to be bothered with such unimportant things—if he remembers four years ago this last July. You might ask him if he would like you to see his correspondence at that time. You might laugh with him, when he is convalescent, over these letters. I have them in this little bag here, which when I heard of your engagement seemed better in your hands than mine. You might," said Edith, holding out her hand to Muriel, and smiling her sweetest smile, "tell Captain Hurstly that his old friends have not forgotten him. Good-bye, my dear Muriel; *bon voyage*—my best respects to your uncle—don't trouble to come downstairs—do you know the last good remedy for *mal-de-mer*?—you never suffer from it? That's right; a speedy return, my dear, and mind you don't forget my little messages to Jack when you see him—good-bye!"

Muriel waited until the door was closed, then she went and looked at the letters. She knew the handwriting; she hungered for a sight of any words from him; and she looked at it now as if she was looking at it for the last time. Then she sat down where Edith le Mentier had been sitting, and tore them up one by one and threw them into the fire. Muriel had scarcely finished when Sir Arthur came into the room.

"Muriel!" he cried in a tone of justifiable displeasure, "I have told you before never to put paper into the fire. Do you know you endanger our lives by your carelessness? Letters should be put into the waste-paper basket, not made bonfires of! Have you got your trunks packed, child, and all your arrangements made? We start in another hour."

"Uncle Arthur," said Muriel quietly, "you will think me very strange, I know, and very wilful, but I'm not going to start to-day. I'm going back to the club to-night. I—I don't think I am feeling very well."

Expression for the most part is a distinctly limited faculty, and those who carry it to its bounds in the ordinary occurrence of life find nothing left to say when the occasion transcends their experience. Sir Arthur Dallerton was dumb; he made several efforts to speak—he put his hand to his heart—he stared at the ceiling—he was almost startled into a prayer—finally he gasped out:—

"You wicked girl! Send my man to me," and closed his eyes.

Muriel escaped. He had not tried to combat her decision; he was in fact very much relieved not to have to go. He had only submitted to the mid-winter journey because it was expected of him—but he was surprised, horribly surprised. There is something very shocking to an Englishman in any sudden change: to Sir Arthur Dallerton it amounted to a crime. Muriel had surprised him, and he could not forgive her.

It was dark when Muriel drove back to the club that night, but the fog had lifted and the stars were out. There was something in the street lights and noises that awoke in her the tremendous emptiness the world can hold. It was a shadow, a delusion, a mere dim, spectral mist, the background for an infinite weary pain that made the real pivot of the universe. She almost killed herself with self-reproaches. What was she that she should blot out the glory of her lover's world for the words of a jealous woman?—for a mistake in the past—a sin if you choose. It might be a sin. If he had sinned all the sins, if he was sin itself, it didn't matter—she loved him—loved him—loved him! And the great steamer with its iron speed might even now be leaving the docks, and she had set her face against him like a flint, and there was no turning back. Life had placed before her the old choice of love and duty, and though passion justified of reason rose with double power to storm the fortress of her will, and last, and bitterest of all, the traitor within called to her to give way for hope's sake, life's sake, love's sake, when it seemed for another's good—to release one she would have gladly died to comfort—to gain that which in all the world she most desired for his sake, for her own, for the apparent good of them both—(Oh, how the traitor clamors at the gate, the traitor with those eyes, that voice!)—all the glowing world of hers, the infinite golden gladness of love—even with those to oppose and madden her, she shut her hands tight, and with a wordless, inexpressible prayer lifted up her soul. With most the struggle comes before decision, with many at the point itself, but with some few it is after the decision is made and when there is no turning back. So Muriel struggled now, though at the moment she had been wrapt as it were apart from all uncertainty in the cloud of renunciation.

"Muriel!" Cynthia stood before her, petrified. Had she had news it was too late? She drew her towards the fire, and Muriel sat down and looked at her wistfully as a child might.

"I think I had better tell you all about it now," she said, "though I feel sure you will not understand."

"You have been doing something foolish, I suppose," said Cynthia curtly. "Well, what is it?" But she drew very tenderly the girl's jacket off, and smoothed her hair with gentle hands.

"I have given Jack up," said Muriel wearily, "because Edith le Mentier ——" she stopped. "Oh, I can't explain," she murmured. "The words don't mean anything, but—but, Cynthia, I couldn't marry a man who had once loved, or thought he loved, that woman. I could not trust a man whom I felt was weaker than I. If I had children——" she paused again. "You see I knew a woman who married, and the man was a dear fellow; but he had been weak, and the strain was in him—and he was weak again. When I was engaged to Alec Bruce she said to me, 'It's not of so much importance to avoid bad men—they're danger signals we aren't blind to—but for God's sake never marry a weak one.'" Muriel caught her breath with a little dry sob.

"Oh, you little idiot, you little idiot," cried Cynthia with flashing eyes. "What's another woman's, any woman's, all other women's experience to one's own heart? Love, and take the consequences—there's nothing else; it's the only thing worth while. Why should you condemn yourself and Jack to a death in life because of that wretched woman?—besides, you don't even know if it's true! It's madness, Muriel—madness. He'll marry somebody else, and turn out a mere do-nothing, and you'll wear your life out in another five years. And it's all useless, reasonless, cruel. And then you'll pray for his soul, and expect me too, perhaps. But I shan't! Can't you see you're driving him back to her?"

Muriel dragged herself to her feet. "You forget I believe," she said very slowly, "in the life of the world to come." Then covering her face with her hands she burst into tears.

Cynthia Grant wrote that night to her brother: "I don't know whether it's any use, Geoff, but she's broken the whole business off between herself and Jack Hurstly. She's desperate, but determined. It's all for a mere nothing. I cannot understand her; but I won't let her work herself to death if I can help it. She was a fool ever to have cared for him, and more of a fool not to have married him. It would be difficult to know which we do more harm with, we women, our hearts or our souls—'Where a soul may be discerned.'"

But Muriel was on her knees all night praying that he might live and she might be forgiven.

CHAPTER XVI

"If Winter come, can Spring be far behind!"

It was a day when all hope of spring was left behind—withered in a black northeaster—when every one unfortunate enough to be in England longs for the south of France, and every one who has been out of England compares it unfavorably with other climates.

Cynthia had left Muriel with a frightful cold and the club accounts, and had gone out to buy her some violets. They had heard that morning from Mary Huntly that Jack was recovering, though the fever resulting from the accident had necessitated sick leave. He would probably have got Muriel's letter by now. Cynthia looked longingly at some impossibly expensive roses, when she heard a man's voice behind her.

"By Jove! Cynthia!" Her heart leaped from January to June. She turned her head slightly to face the obtruder—a delicate, fine-looking man with the eyes of a poet, and a chin which it would do some poets good to have. It took a moment for them to get over the memory of the last time they had met. It had begun to rain a little, and people had put up their umbrellas and pushed on more rapidly than ever.

"What do you want?" he asked, looking from the girl to the window.

"What can you afford?" said Cynthia, laughing. She was wondering what people wanted to hurry for on such a lovely day.

"I am very rich," he responded. "Honor bright! I could buy over the business. I sold my last picture for—I can't tell you how much, it might stir up your demon of independence. I'm going to get you the roses." In two minutes he came back with them in his hand. "By the way, you might as well put up your umbrella, mightn't you, it seems to be raining?" he said.

"Oh, so it is," said Cynthia absently. They stood together uncomfortably, knowing that if no good excuse arose they would have to part.

"Don't you think a cup of tea would be nice?" he suggested. Cynthia nodded her head decisively.

"Yes," she said, "and muffins."

"Do you remember," said her companion, as they turned towards a possible restaurant "those dear little French cakes and——"

"I don't remember anything," said Cynthia sternly, "and I'm not going to." Leslie Damores laughed.

"You even forgot," he said teasingly, "just now that it was raining!"

"I thought you were in France. I didn't know you were ever coming back to England again," said Cynthia a little doubtfully. She noticed that he had not asked her what she was doing, and it hurt her. She would volunteer no information. They sat down by a clean table in a warm inner room; neat-capped maids fluttered here and there; it was very restful and very English. To the artist who had not been in England for eight years it was home, and the girl who held the roses in her lap filled in the picture. He studied her face carefully.

"You're awfully changed," he said at last. Cynthia laughed.

"I was twenty-two when I saw you last, and now I am thirty. I was never one of the dimpling kind that stay young either; as for you—you're a man, so it's different. But"—her voice grew strangely gentle—"you're not quite the same, you know, Leslie; fame has come to you, and you look more of a fighter, and yet not quite so hard."

"Strange, isn't it, that youth should be so exacting—with its impossible whites and blacks—and that the more one roughs it, and the harder knocks one gets, the more generously shaded it all becomes," he said, watching her with keen, eager eyes. She turned her head away and played restlessly with the flowers in her lap. "It could never change as much as that," she thought.

The muffins were the nicest she had ever tasted, the white-capped maid the prettiest, the tea the most refreshing. It all passed so terribly soon, and through it all they laughed and chaffed each other like two schoolboys in the slang of the Paris studio. It appeared that Cynthia had not forgotten quite so sweepingly as she asserted; they were too afraid of being in earnest to do anything but talk nonsense. They left the little place reluctantly, Leslie Damores feeing the white-capped maid beyond the dreams of avarice. She decided that he must be American. The rain had stopped, and wintry sunset gleams warned Cynthia of the hour.

"I'm late," she said; "you'd better call a hansom." He hesitated before he asked where he should tell the cabman to drive. Cynthia set her lips. "He might have spared me that," she thought. He was a delicate fellow, and he shivered slightly in the cold. It was this that settled her. "I am working with a friend of mine in the slums," she said hastily. "Here is my card with the address on it; look us up some day if you can spare the time—good-bye."

He went off whistling like a boy with his hands in his pockets, wondering when might be the earliest he might go to her, and upbraiding

himself for his wish earlier in the afternoon never to have set foot in London.

Cynthia came into the little dark lodging-room like a fire, a whirlwind, and summer lightning all in one. There were the flowers to arrange, lamps to be lit, the supper to get. Muriel watched her with surprise. This magnificent woman, with wide-open, happy eyes, strange, sudden smiles, that came and went, and air of life and sunshine, was a transformation from the cold, stern woman with the grim and almost repellant attitude of hard reserve. She was sweetened, softened, glorified, and she looked at Muriel as a mother might look at her child. The evening was full of club-work, and even there Cynthia showed herself brightly. As a rule she "had no patience with the girls," and ruled more by fear than love, mingled with a sort of good-natured contempt. But to-night there was a new look of friendliness in her eyes, and her voice grew kind and gentle as she explained some simple medical rules of health, giving the girls object-lessons in bandaging, showing them how to check hæmorrhage, so absorbed and interested herself that in spite of themselves the girls drew near and listened. One of them, a tall, slender girl of some fifteen years, with already the face of a woman of thirty, pushed her way to the front.

"Oy siy, can you do hanythink for a little fellar with a bad back?" Cynthia nodded shortly.

"Don't interrupt the class; you can bring him to me afterwards," she said.

The girl with a coarse laugh pushed through her companions to the door. It was a strange scene: the large room of the old factory, clean and bright, with a blazing fire; a work-table on which lay piles of bandages and splints; groups of rough, strangely garbed, out-of-elbows women, each with a large curled fringe, under which the tired eyes appealed to one as strangely unnatural, and, in the midst of them, trim, erect, commanding Cynthia. Orders, questions, explanations ringing out. She stood like a disciplined sergeant amongst a throng of raw recruits—and recruits they were, let into the great army of humanity with no safeguards, no training, or only the most elementary, all dreary, purposeless, hacking their way through life. Only now and then into this rank-and-file of the world dipped their more splendid sisters who knew the aim of it all, and could teach them the means of attainment. There, under the flaring gas-jets, in the midst of the strange, teeming life of Stepney, horrible, oppressive, marvellously primitive, naked of the veneer of civilization, two women labored to bring light and help. Cynthia felt strangely uplifted. Her heart was singing the song "The stars sing in their spheres." She did not feel the hopelessness of it all.

After the class was over she was about to lock up the club and go back to Muriel, when the girl who had interrupted the class entered again carrying a bundle in her arms. She placed it very gently on the table.

"'Ere's the little fellar," she said quietly. Cynthia pulled back the blanket and started with surprise at the picture before her—a baby boy of three years old, his head a mass of black curls, and underneath great blue Irish eyes. His face, flushed with recent sleep, looked up at her. The girl seeing the admiration in her face smiled proudly. "'E's all I 'ave," she said. "Mother left 'im to me to see to three years since, for father 'e went off with another woman, and she took it to 'art, mother did, so she died. Think likely 'e'll git better, miss?"

Cynthia lifted the child into her arms. There was no mistaking the cruelly twisted spine. He might live two years, or even three, but it was a bad case—incurable. She looked from the beautiful baby face to the eager, passionate look in the girl's eyes, who was hungry for an answer. Cynthia felt angry with the hopeless tragedy of it. Possibly Muriel might have known what to say; for herself she raved against the invincible spirit of maternity, at once the torture and compensation for all who love the little ones.

"Does he suffer much?" she asked.

"'E do cry hawful sometimes, pore little chap. Can you do hanythink, miss?"

"Do anything? I daresay I can make him a little easier, but it's a very bad case."

"Do you mean as 'ow 'e'll never get any better?"

"I'm afraid not, Carrie."

"Do you mean as 'ow 'e'll die?" There was an awful intensity in the question.

"He may live some time yet." The girl wrapped the child up in the blanket; the fierceness in her eyes did not prevent the gentle touches of her hands.

"I 'ate God, so there! an' I 'ate the club! an' I 'ate you and the other lidy! I 'ate you all!" she cried hoarsely. Then suddenly the anger died out of her face; she turned hopelessly to the door, pausing irresolutely she asked again in dull despair, "Then there isn't hanythink as you can do?"

"Very little, I'm afraid." She drew the blanket closer round the child and passed out into the night.

It was late and Muriel had gone to bed. Cynthia came in and sat down by her.

"Do you think a man would ever trust a girl a second time?" she asked.

"That would depend, wouldn't it," said Muriel thoughtfully, "upon the girl's character, and the attitude towards the broken trust, and how long ago it had happened, and what she had done in the meantime?"

"Do you think it possible if she was different that he would love her again?" Muriel sighed.

"I would have married Jack," she said, "if he had been different, but he was the same. I suppose it all depends on whether one's power of detachment is strong enough."

"You're very tired, dearest," said Cynthia, "and I shouldn't bother you; but—but I suppose you pray, don't you?" Muriel smiled; she did not say she had done nothing else since she had forfeited her life's happiness.

"Yes, I try to," she said.

"Then," said Cynthia, "perhaps you might as well pray for me. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XVII

"Our mind receives but what it holds—no more."

PEOPLE whom everybody considers tender-hearted and good-natured do not like to wake up to the fact that they are neither. It takes a good deal to wake them up to it, and they are apt to be indignant and incredulous even then. Gladys had always been considered particularly, gracefully unselfish. People might think her a little astonishing and unconventional, but this they put down to her American training; as for being underhand, cruel and grasping, no one would have dreamed it of her, and she least of all of herself. Love is a teacher of many lessons, and tears away all screens; there is no room left for anything but the real.

Love and pain together are the two world forces for sincerity, and Gladys' sincerity was not pleasant to look at. She was possessed with the one desire—Jack. She wanted him; she hated everything and everybody else. Right and wrong became two faint, inadequate words; she would have stopped at nothing to gain her ends.

Even the dramatic instinct which had carried her through emotional friendships made her attractive and alluring to those to whom she was utterly indifferent, devout and regular in her religious attendances, eager and sympathetic over the miseries of the poor, they were all swept away. She planned, plotted, schemed and lived to meet and win Jack Hurstly.

For the sake of meeting him she made friends to a far greater extent with Edith le Mentier. She smiled in tender graciousness upon Alec Bruce, she treated Sir Arthur Dallerton when she met him with the greatest interest and respect.

It was through him she learned first that Muriel was not going to India, second that her engagement with Jack Hurstly was "off," after that she ceased to take any interest in him at all. People said it was time she was married.

It took Jack a long time to realize that Muriel meant what she said. He wrote again, and it was not till she stopped answering him that he began to believe her. The key he held to the woman riddle says that "A woman who goes on saying no is easier to turn than the woman who says nothing." India

and the old influences of the regiment had undone a good deal of her training.

Jack told himself he was a fool to have loved her, and agreed with the world's verdict that she "really went too far." In fact the world turned its back on her. She had had two good marriages in her hand and thrown them away; her society was a strain; she did unheard-of things; she was really better in the slums.

Everybody told him he was well out of it, and though he was outwardly indignant at their judgment it took the edge off his sorrow. He grew rapidly strong, and hunted more than ever. He was not to be invalided home, and he had been very badly treated. He looked upon this as virtual absolution for whatever dissipations he might be led into. Even in the nineteenth century few men have found a better excuse than "The woman Thou gavest me."

One evening as Jack sat smoking in his quarters, wondering lazily what sort of a drink it would be most possible to enjoy, a knock at the door aroused him from his thoughts, and gave entrance to a favorite young subaltern.

"Hullo, Musgrave!—come in!" he said with warmth. "Have a drink?" he added as the young fellow sank into a chair. Musgrave shook his head. "Anything up?" Jack asked with surprise.

"Nothing particular," said Jim Musgrave. "My aunt's coming out here, though. I shall have to sit up for her."

"Oh! I say that's bad," said his friend sympathetically.

"She's going to bring a mighty pretty girl out with her, though, to jam the powder," said the nephew irreverently. "The fact of the matter is I believe it's for the girl's sake she's coming. There's an awful dearth going on in London—herds of pretty girls and nothing to gain by it, you know—I don't know what England's coming to—we're so scarce—they say the returns after the season are something awful!" Jack laughed grimly.

"I'm one of them," he said. "I didn't make myself scarce enough it seems. Who's your aunt, by-the-bye? Perhaps I know her."

"Mrs. Huntly. Her husband was a fellow of 'ours,' you know; but he got on the shelf, and they gave him some appointment at home to hush him asleep with. We have an awfully short day, haven't we? And a beastly hot one!" The young man's eyes grew wistful, for he loved his profession; and he had not been out long enough to grow stale, or to have his ambitions adjust themselves to lower standards. Jack sighed.

"It's a bit too long for some of us," he said; and he dutifully thought of Muriel, till the remembrance of a polo match transformed them both into enthusiasts, and the talk grew unintelligibly technical.

It was not until Jim Musgrave rose to go back to his own quarters that Jack remembered to tell him that his aunt was an old friend of his, and to ask if the pretty girl was her cousin, Miss Travers.

"By Jove, do you know her?" shouted the surprised Jim. Jack nodded.

"Good-night!" he said briefly, and Jim took his dismissal, wondering how well his friend had known Miss Travers. Jack remembered the look in Gladys' eyes, and resolutely pretended that it meant nothing; nevertheless he was not altogether sorry he was going to see her again. He told himself it was because she was Muriel's great friend.

Then he went out to have a final look at the pony; it was necessary that it should be really fit for to-morrow's match.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Where will God be absent? In His Face
Is light, but in His Shadow healing too."

"MY DEAR MURIEL,

"You and I have always been good friends, and though I have never said anything to you about your trouble over Jack Hurstly it has not been because I have not felt for you. I thought that you were very foolish to give him up. Still you were never really suited to each other, and it is better to give a thing up than to hold on to it too long. I think one of the saddest things is to realize how well one can get on without some one who seemed so absolutely necessary. Men always reach it soonest, for if they can't attain their ideals they can satisfy their instincts, while we women have to rub on between the two and dress nicely. My husband wants to see India again—why, I don't know—smells, heat, travel and inferior races, not to mention being cut off from everything for months, and I've promised to accompany him, principally because it's easier to accept than refuse, and Gladys seems so set on it. She has promised to give Alec Bruce his answer when she returns. It is positively a last flourish, she declares; and between you and me I think she means to try once more for the bird in the bush before settling on the hand one.

"It's rather brutal of me to write of it to you, but though she is clever enough and blinds most people I feel certain she cares for Jack, and I am a little uncertain as to how he will act when he finds it out.

"If pebbles were as rare, we should most of us prefer them to diamonds, I expect, and only a few would say, 'Ah, but they don't shine!' How you will shake your head, dear! but, trust me, proximity and the hat that suits weigh a good deal more than a fine character with most men, and Gladys always chooses her hats well. Women of my age are past the time of romance (Edith le Mentier would scarcely agree with me). Legitimate romance, at any rate—if there is such a thing—is a little worn out, and I'm not one of the sort that prefer religion to rouge, yet to-night I can't

help confessing the game seems not worth the candle. Not much behind, and not much before, and very little for the meantime. Still I should marry if I were you. You'll have the compensation of saying 'Well, that's done,' and when everything else seems unsubstantial the solid inevitability of wife and motherhood keeps one steady. That's my argument against free love—it's not final enough, and the uncertainties are too great. I had rather myself have a broken heart and a settled position than a broken heart without one. Perhaps you will succeed in avoiding both. Don't think I'm morbid—probably my dinner has disagreed with me. By-the-bye, the doctor says there's something wrong with my lungs—but I don't believe in doctors. Good-bye.

"MARY."

Muriel read Mary Huntly's letter over slowly with sad eyes. There was a hopeless ring in it, as if the plucky effort to avoid the admission of a life failure had almost proved too much for her. She had attained most things that a woman of the world wishes to attain: a good income, a convenient husband, a boy at Eton, and a fine figure for forty; she was very popular, even with other women, and she had a most capital cook.

"Leslie Damores and I are going on a bus top to Kew Gardens this afternoon," said Cynthia irrelevantly. "And I shall go to tea with him in the studios to see his new picture; he has called it 'The Years of the Locust.' I should rather like to see what he has made of it." Muriel was still puzzling over Mary Huntly's letter.

"She is so fine," she said. "It must count for something, her pluck and dash and the way she faces things; it can't be all shallow, or all selfish—and yet it does work death. Look at poor Mary. Her age of primary things has passed. She has run through most of the thrills, as I suppose we all do by forty, and now what's left for her? She has been keeping yesterday's manna, and she finds that it has gone bad!" Cynthia looked interested.

"I think," she said slowly, "that a great love is the only thing to fill a woman's life. I don't believe that would wear out, would it?"

"I suppose," said Muriel thoughtfully, "that depends on how one uses it; one must carry things on to their farthest extent. I mean—it's stifling to be satisfied. If we go on far enough we shall come to a vista, and it's not till we get to see that things have no end that we are really beginning at all. It is what you can't grasp makes life worth living." Cynthia listened reluctantly.

"But love," she said again, "you can grasp that; and it won't go, will it?"

"All that's best and highest in love you can't grasp, I think," replied Muriel. "It's because one expects to do that that it hurts. The invincible thrill of things is only meant as a launching into life. After that friendship, comradeship, a blending of life to life and heart to heart becomes unconscious development. Paroxysms aren't love, and they have their reaction; but love is beyond and through all, and even in the most sad and sordid moments gleams and throbs an impossible possibility! A thing always to strive for, never to attain!" Cynthia rose and paced the room restlessly.

"Oh, Muriel! Muriel!" she said, "you don't know——" Then she stopped short, and went over and kissed her, an unusual demonstration from Cynthia. "You're so good," she said, "and yet somehow so remote from it all! I think I begin to see now why you didn't marry Jack. I should have faced it as you did, but I should have read the letters, talked about them—and then married him!"

"And been unhappy ever afterwards," said Muriel softly.

"Yes! but that's nothing to do with it," cried Cynthia impatiently. "I acknowledge no afterwards. I would give myself body and soul to the man I loved, like Browning's lady, even if he were the greatest rascal unhung!"

"That's a horribly selfish theory!" said Muriel with sudden emphasis, "and a very dangerous one. You would degrade yourself, hurt the man, and ruin future generations, simply because of an effervescing passion, which soon becomes stagnant if you give it time enough. No one can afford to ignore consequences, least of all a lover. Why is it, do you suppose, that these girls of mine, living like animals, working like slaves, suffering like human beings, don't oftener catch at this passion-flower of yours, and take the poison of it? Simply because they are face to face with the consequences. They can't get away from themselves, and their life is visible and public. They know what a few days' rapture implies—shame, pain, publicity, perhaps starvation. They know that to cut off your nose spites your face, however you may wish to make the surrender! You don't risk a rapid when you see the rocks, only when the rocks are hidden; the consequences ignored, then the selfish, hopeless, aimless life gives in to its instincts; and though before the leap you may have ignored the consequences, it will not prevent the rocks beneath from grinding your life out after the fall." She stopped, her eyes flashing with the intensity of all she meant.

She had given little by little her life over to a problem; one that she hated, had avoided, and that even now racked her with its misery—but it absorbed her.

Things cease to be bearable only when life is empty, and to Muriel her own sorrow, her own heart, had been filled and uplifted by full renunciative hours. Discontent and leisure walk hand in hand, wandering disconsolate over a world teeming with openings and opportunities for energy and power. Then it becomes necessary to invent new games, and religion runs to melancholia—or Christian science.

"I don't think Leslie Damores will ever marry me," said Cynthia slowly. She looked suddenly older and more careworn. "I—I don't think I will go with him this afternoon."

Muriel put on her things to go to the club. Before she went she threw her arms around Cynthia.

"Dearest," she said with glistening eyes, "I don't know what I should do without you."

"Pray more," said Cynthia shortly. Muriel shook her head.

"If you knew what strength you give, and how bright this all seems to come back to!"

"Don't! don't!" said Cynthia sharply. "For God's sake go to the club and leave me alone!"

Muriel went and understood; she knew that it had been necessary to say those words, and after they were said she could do no more. One can start a crisis, but one cannot guide it, and it is usually best to get out of the way. Cynthia sent Leslie Damores away that afternoon, and faced for the first time in her life the years that the locust had eaten. Her lover's picture could not have been more realistic.

CHAPTER XIX

"Only for man; how bitter not to grave
On his Soul's palms one fair, good, wise thing
Just as he grasped it."

—Robert Browning.

Leslie went back to the studio bewildered. She had sent him away without excuses. He wondered blankly what he was being punished for, and why she was denied him in the present; and as Kew Gardens, unless one is a naturalist, is not the place one goes to alone, he sat down before his picture and thought about her in the past.

He was young and full of ideals when he first met her. He believed in the possibility of a Galahad, and that all women were exquisitely good, except a sad few who were picturesquely unfortunate. He had had a good mother, two beautiful sisters, and he had only seen Paris in a veil. He met Cynthia in the studios; her glorious red hair and the wonderful way she looked at him became the key to the universe. After that followed months of ideal companionship, and on his part at least unprecedented blindness. Perhaps she loved him for that most of all. Then she told him. He was horribly startled. He said surprised and terrible things, and then she looked at him—Oh that wonderful, broken, tragic look!—and went back to her brother. And he grew older, and wiser, and less surprised.

He had not meant to find her in London. When he had, and they met again and yet again, and in fact even from the moment when she had told him where and how she lived, he had made the great decision.

The locusts should eat no more empty years. If she could forget (*could* she forget, forgive at least?) that stammering judgment eight years ago, how happy they would be together! What noble, magnificent work would they not do—together—and now she had sent him away with no excuse. Had that self-made barrier of his fallen for another to rise? He smoked hard and rang the bell. There is always one way of finding out things if a man has sense and no false pride—to ask. He was going to ask, and he smiled grimly to himself as he thought of the answer she would give him—*should* give him!—if strength and power and purpose went for anything. The tea-things that were set out for her looked miserable as only neglected food can look, and

the room lost in the gathering twilight seemed emptily expectant of the guest who had not come.

Leslie Damores cared nothing at all for omens and less for gloom, and even the fact that he could not find his matches did not evoke a frown. He was going to see her, and he *meant* to see her, and he terribly over-paid the cabman's fare. How many sullen looks and surly words do we not owe to the over-generosity of lovers, who appear to think that by tipping the universe they will earn the reward of Providence in the shape they most desire? Alas! we human beings are always misplacing our tips, and then we wonder when the raps that come to us seem to be misplaced as well!

CHAPTER XX

"God is in all men, but all men are not in God: that is the reason why they suffer."

IT was hot, with that intense silken quiver in the air which turns the atmosphere into a living creature.

That "certain twilight" moment was already beginning to "cut the glory from the gray," and across the Indian garden strolled two figures scarcely conscious of the breathless life, so interested were they in each other. Gladys Travers, in a well-fitting gown, a cloud of something soft that sunk into a shower of lovely curves, led the way through the trees to a seat.

"I call it a summer-house," she said. "It sounds so English!"

"Ah!" Jack Hurstly answered half wistfully, "you've already begun to hunger for home. We all have it, you know, and try to call the most un-English things by familiar names, just to trick ourselves into thinking—Heaven knows what—that it isn't quite so far away, I suppose."

"It seems hardly possible that we have been here two months," sighed Gladys. "And it *was* so strange to find you here!"

Strange, indeed, Gladys! after the care-succeeding stratagem and innocent purposeful planning that took you and your good-natured cousin so straight across India to the station (not so frequently a resort for English travellers), simply because there this broad-shouldered young Englishman lived and rode and shot and spoke bitterly of life.

"It was most lucky for me," he answered honestly; "and I shall miss you awfully when you go."

"You are very fond of Mary, aren't you?" she said looking at the ground.

"Yes, Miss Travers." Gladys smiled.

"You're rather stupid, you know," she said.

"I think it's you who are rather unkind," he answered. "And what are you going to do with Jim?" Gladys frowned; the conversation at that moment was more interesting without Jim.

"*Do* with him!" she began indignantly, and then suddenly she laughed and turned dancing eyes upon her companion. "Do you know," she cried, "I haven't the faintest *idea* what to do with him! What should you think?"

"He's a very nice fellow, Miss Gladys."

"Then shall I marry him?" Captain Hurstly drew a long breath; it was rather like playing with fire. The sun sunk speedily in the west, and now in a glowing rose veil plunged behind the hills. Gladys looked up at him from under her long eyelashes. There was something a little wistful in her glance.

"Do you *want* me to marry him, please?" she asked. Jack looked from the sky to her face; it had caught the glow of the sunset.

"I don't want you to marry anybody," he said simply.

"Ah!" said Gladys, and there was a silence—dangerous, electric, full of unspoken things.

"You knew Muriel?" he said abruptly at last.

"She was a dear friend of mine," Gladys replied softly.

"*Was!* Isn't she now, then?" he questioned. She blushed and looked away. "Won't you tell me?" he asked gently.

"I thought she was unjust—very unjust to you!" Gladys murmured. "It hurt me that she should misunderstand any one."

"You're very generous," he replied gravely. "But how do you know, Miss Gladys, that she did misjudge me? Perhaps she was right to have nothing to do with such a poor sort of chap."

Gladys sprang to her feet, her eyes flashed, and she shook a little, her voice was low and intense, and Jack, who rose to his feet also and stood opposite to her, was drawn into the circle of her emotions.

"No! Captain Hurstly. She was wrong—utterly wrong!" the girl cried. "What are we sheltered, protected darlings, brought up with closed eyes and within walls, to know of the world and man's temptations? How dare we judge who have no standards of comparison? And if we love"—her voice grew so tender it was like music—"and if we love it is for man's redemption, not for the satisfaction of our own, thin, misty ideals! And it should be the crown of our life to raise the man we love from lower things, and trust in his love to leave them for ever far behind!" She moved nervously back to the seat, and turned that she might still half face him. "I don't know what I've been saying," she said breathlessly. "I am afraid it must sound very silly and foolish to you, and rather—rather uncalled for; but it has always seemed to me that women like Muriel, who think God's tools not good enough for them, do a terrible amount of harm." Jack took a step forward and looked down at her.

"If there were more women like you," he said huskily, "there would be fewer men—like me, Miss Gladys." Gladys smiled a little. It was difficult for her to be serious for long.

"Then," she said, "it's certainly a good thing that I'm unique." . . .

"My dear child! you know perfectly well that this is the most unhealthy time to be out in. Go in at once and dress for dinner! Really, Jack, I should have thought you would have known better!"—Mary Huntly shook her head at him reproachfully. Gladys lifting her eyes up to Jack, with a mixture of amusement and regret, turned gracefully and passed into the house. Mary Huntly, for all her sage advice, stayed out in the fast deepening darkness.

They walked for a little in silence towards the gate. Mary turned over in her mind what she should say to him. It was hard—extremely hard—and, worse, it looked disagreeable. She was used to doing difficult things, but as a rule they had delightful effects. She very much doubted as a woman of the world whether what she had to say would have any effect, but as a woman a little beyond the world she knew she ought to say it.

"My dear boy!" she said as they reached the gate, "that girl doesn't ring true."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Huntly?" Jack asked sternly. "Are you talking of—Miss Gladys?" He made that fatal half instant's pause before her name that marks a lover.

"You have made one mistake already in falling in love with a woman too good for you," she answered quietly, "don't make the worse one of falling in love with a woman—not good enough! Good-night! I think you had better not come in after dinner this evening."

Jack would have stayed and insisted on further explanations, for he was perplexed and angry—there's nothing that makes a straightforward man so angry as perplexity—but Jim Musgrave who was going to dine with them came up, and in a mixture of greetings and farewells he had to go, but as he went he said very distinctly:—

"Mrs. Huntly, may I come in to-morrow?" Mrs. Huntly saw in a flash it had been no use.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "What a lot of moths you have in this climate of yours. Good-night!"

The gorgeous moon, the thin low whisper of the tropic night, the rustling, murmuring life, which rose from the earth to the low sky above, seemed something of a new birth to Jack as free from the fetters of an old love he paused on the brink of a new, and because it was new imagined there would be no fetters.

CHAPTER XXI

"She crossed his path with her hunting noose, and over him drew her net."

GLADYS was the incarnation of sprightliness; her shimmering green dress made her look like some beautiful heartless naiad of the woods.

When dinner was over she sang softly to Jim, letting her eyes rest on him with a light caressing smile. Her own world had turned to paradise. She was playing with sunbeams on a golden earth. It was impossible for her to be anything but charming.

Mary was very tired. She sat and talked with her husband about the boy at Eton; for a while at least she washed her hands of Gladys.

Finally the music stopped. Gladys' hands sunk into her lap, and Jim looking at her in an adoring simplicity set about for words which were not too common to present to his goddess.

"I say" (the invocation seemed a little modern) "that's an awfully ripping dress you've got on to-night."

"Do *you* like it, Jim?" It was impossible for her to help the emphasis. It had been said of her that if she were left alone in a desert she would flirt with a camel. Jim would have sold his soul for a compliment, but could only repeat:—

"Awfully!"

"Are you fond of being a soldier, Jim?" she asked. She was wondering why Jack Hurstly did not come.

"I think it's the grandest profession in the world!" he said proudly. "People don't do us a bit of justice except when there's a row on, and then they praise us for the wrong things. They don't understand that a man must be a decent sort of chap to win the respect of his men; and there are fine chances, you know, that a fellow gets on the frontier to show what he is made of. To hush up a disturbance or keep a district quiet, are pretty good pieces of work. I hope you don't think we're all of us brutes or blackguards, Miss Gladys?"

"No, Jim—oh, no!" said Gladys softly. "I think you're the finest men in the world, the most chivalrous to women, the strongest and the gentlest—

truest friend and noblest foe!" Jim thought it was too beautiful for words, also that it was original; but it was not exactly what he meant, and it put an end to the discussion.

"How does Captain Hurstly get on with his men?" she asked. It was evident by her tone that she was not much interested in Captain Hurstly.

"Oh, well enough," said Jim doubtfully. "Only you see he had rather a bad time with a girl at home, and that rather put him off his work, I think. He doesn't seem as interested as he used to be."

"I don't believe he cared for her," said Gladys shortly. If there is nothing else to do with a clumsy fact, one can ignore it.

"Oh, yes, he did awfully," said the unconscious Jim. "I never saw a fellow so cut up before about a girl. She must have been a jolly decent-looking girl, too—I've seen her photograph."

"Really you're very rude—you contradicted me flatly," cried Gladys.

"Oh, but he *did*, you know," said the over-truthful James. "*I* didn't think she was so awfully fetching, though," he added hastily, with the bright hope that jealousy of *him* might have promoted the frown he saw. Gladys yawned.

"You're very dull to-night," she said, "doing nothing but talk of the uninteresting love affairs of your uninteresting friends!" Jim flushed angrily; he was conscious that he had not introduced the subject, but he was too loyal to say so.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Gladys," he said; "there's something I'd much rather talk about."

"And that?" said Gladys, lifting unconscious eyelashes with innocent ease.

"I think you know," he said with the dignified gravity of extreme youth over a compliment.

"If you mean me," said Gladys smiling sweetly, "I think you're very rude to call me a 'thing,' and it's horrid bad form to talk about a girl, you know." The rest of the evening passed in a pleasant, dangerous fashion.

At parting Jim wore the rose she herself had worn at dinner. It was the pledge of all dear, impossible things to him; it was the usual termination of an evening's episode to her—a gardener would have accused it of blight.

CHAPTER XXII

"The truth was felt by instinct here—
Process which saves a world of time."

DESPERATION, when it does not rave, becomes a calm; and it was with an almost listless quiet that Cynthia, sitting opposite her brother in his office, told him she was going away.

He nodded briefly, and went on writing prescriptions. He had not quite finished his evening's work. The boy was to deliver them to his patients. The room was bare and light, with the usual rows of medical books, long suggestive chair, and the sturdy boy standing near a forbidding cupboard.

Cynthia's eyes took in the surroundings as if they had been new to her.

She had argued bitterly with her brother over having no lamp-shades, and the naked bright skeleton roused in her now a sense of irritation. Would Geoff never be done, and why was he so little interested in her going away?

But he had always been a man of one idea, she thought, and what interest he had was buried in his prescriptions. Ten minutes later he sent off the boy with a curt order or two, then he turned and looked at his sister.

"Going away, are you?" he said. He might have been drawing out a shy child, or encouraging a nervous patient. Cynthia shrugged her shoulders.

"So I told you."

"Have you thought why, or where, or when?"

"I am going to a place in Somerset on the red Bristol Channel, where they have mud, and sunsets, and one can be alone."

"The desire for mud is very modern, and sunsets only happen once a day," he replied thoughtfully. "And as for being alone, you couldn't be in a better place than London, you know, for that. People can't stand so much in the country. However, I daresay a rest would do you good. Mind you take some books—light ones; and be careful where you go for milk—it's disgraceful how they adulterate it in out-of-way places." He was giving her time, and observing with keen watching eyes the lines of trouble and pain marked in Cynthia's face.

"Geoff!" she cried with a sudden wail in her voice, "I want you! I want you!" He knew that she did not mean him; but he took her in his arms and

stroked her hair. Cynthia sobbed a little in a hard choked way; she could not let herself go completely even in a breakdown.

"Shall we go to Paris?" he asked gently. "I have always wanted to study under the professors there." He looked around his meagre office-room peopled with his love, his work, his dreams, to stay there another year till success lay in his grasp, to win life for his cases, each one meaning to him what a battle means to a soldier; all that went to make interest, satisfaction, attainment, must go because a woman wanted—another man. He did not mince matters, he only repeated the magnificent lie that rang better than most truths, "I have always hoped for a chance like this!"

"But you couldn't leave your practice?" she protested.

"I could get an assistant for a time to take my place. It's only for six months or a year, isn't it?"

"There's Muriel—Geoff!" she reminded him.

"You told me to get the idea of her out of my head—perhaps six months or a year will do it," said Dr. Grant. He was smiling grimly to himself as he spoke. When a man attempts endurance it makes for something very fine. When Cynthia looked at him she saw nothing but kind, half-amused and wholly sympathetic eyes.

"I think it's splendid you're so placid," she said; "I don't believe you feel things at all."

"I feel very much being kept away from my supper after working hard all day!" he laughed mischievously.

"Oh, you poor, dear thing! I'll see about it at once!" she cried running from the room.

The doctor flung open the window wide and stood watching the streaming crowd in the dusk. The lights seemed alive against the dark masses of houses—impenetrable, mysterious, holding life-histories—and showing nothing but blank strong faces to the passers-by.

The doctor believed in no God at all; but when he looked above the house-tops to the sky, peopled by myriad stars, he felt a moment's emotion, a thrill of hope, courage and strength.

God believed in him perhaps, and because he would not draw near with faith led him by his most unreasonable passion—love of humanity—nearer than he knew to the divine in humanity.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I am half-sick of shadows."

MURIEL read Cynthia's letter wonderingly. It was short, and merely contained her reasons for leaving Muriel for six months at least. By the end of that time Leslie Damores would have given her up, and she would be more fit to take up her life again. Muriel was not to tell him that she was ever coming back; she was not to overdo herself or live alone, and above all she must not give him her address. Geoff was going with her. Muriel sighed and frowned; the sigh was one of loneliness. She had got so used to companionship—Cynthia's, and generally her brother in the evening. It was something to have a man to discuss things with sensibly even if she never agreed with him. She frowned because it was a little strange he had not written to say good-bye.

He had got over caring for her that was evident. She was glad of that—of course she was extremely glad of it. Suddenly she felt tired and discouraged. The girls had been unresponsive and tiresome in the Bible-class. She loved Paris; she could see its clean, broad streets filled with brilliant, rapid life, bright and gay and fresh, alive with incessant laughter.

It was a damp, foggy evening and the fire smoked. They had such theaters in Paris, and then the studios! Muriel had studied there for six months in the pleasantest and easiest fashion. Sometimes the love of her old, careless radiant life, pleasure and beauty, and the ease of things made her catch her breath and remember she was twenty-seven, and her eyes were beautiful, and there was that couple downstairs drunk and quarrelling again! It was too late for tea, too early for supper, and if she lit the candle she would have to write letters.

The door-bell clanged, and she heard a man's voice. For a moment she thought it was Dr. Grant coming to say good-bye. Her hands wandered instinctively to her hair. No!—he asked for Cynthia. He must see her—but she was out. "Then Miss Dallerton"—the girl "would see." The blackbeetle's heavy footsteps paused outside her door. Muriel lit the candles and poked the fire.

"Yes, I will see Mr. Damores," she said smiling encouragingly at the girl.

She felt less depressed because she had already begun to sympathize, and yet she could not help feeling angry with Leslie Damores.

He stood before her, tall, handsome, eager; she sat down and waited for him to speak. One of the most extraordinary things about her was her willingness to wait for somebody else, even her silence was an invitation.

"Cynthia wouldn't see me," he began, almost boyishly. "Won't you tell me why, and where she is, Miss Muriel?"

"She has gone away, Mr. Damores, and left us both. It's a case of double desertion, isn't it?" she laughed nervously, for the look in his eyes was too strongly anxious to make the interview a pleasant one.

"Has she left you a message for me?"

"She does not wish to see you again," said Muriel gravely. He was quite silent, with his eyes bent on the carpet.

"Then—and you—do you approve of her decision?" he asked slowly, his voice so different from his first eager greeting. It was tired and a little thick. An idea flashed through Muriel's mind; she leaned forward suddenly.

"Mr. Damores, do you care for her?" she asked. He squared his shoulders, and looked back at her steadily, but a little surprised.

"Really, Miss Muriel, I thought—I thought it was pretty obvious!" he replied.

"Then," said Muriel, "I think very poorly of you for not wishing to marry her!"

"But, good Heavens! Miss Dallerton," he cried, now really astonished, "I want nothing so much! I came here, if you must know, simply for that purpose! and I find her—gone—leaving no traces, and, if you will excuse my saying so, a great deal of confusion behind her!"

"I certainly do feel confusion, not to say chaos," said Muriel smiling; "and the worst of it is I can't possibly explain. However one thing's evident, if you want her you must look for her, for I have no address beyond Paris. She hates writing letters, and it will probably be a month at least before she writes and gives it to me. Will you wait in London?" Leslie Damores smiled.

"I might find her in Paris, and I shall not find her here," he said; "and when I do find her, I shall bring her back. Good-bye, Miss Dallerton; I'm glad I didn't deserve your scolding this time, it looked as if it was going to be a pretty bad one. Oh, but I was a fool for not marrying Cynthia eight years ago!" Muriel held out both her hands to him, her eyes filled with tears.

"I am glad you are going to her," she said. "I won't wish you luck, because there is something so much better that you have got already; but I

can't help being a little sorry, for she will never come back to me again!"

"Are you all alone?" he asked.

"There's my work," she said; "and the blackbeetle, who is a great friend of mine, and looks after me very well."

"Do you remember 'The Lady of Shalott?'" he asked abruptly. "I always liked that last line of it, 'God in His mercy lend her grace.' Good-bye, Miss Dallerton." He was gone, hopeful and strong once more, with the possibility of satisfaction within his grasp, and Muriel again alone.

"It was all very well for Launcelot to say that," she thought, "but when she needed him most she had no loyal knight and true, the Lady of Shalott, and—and not even God's grace would make her forget that!" And Muriel put her arms on the table and cried a little about Jack—at least she thought it was about Jack, but it was really that Cynthia's hand was on what she herself had missed. The woman's lips that bear no kiss of love seem formed in vain; even the angels must sigh for them—and not even the angels satisfy. Yet she had held it all once, and remorse and passion and pity mocked at her for having thrown life's gift away.

When the blackbeetle, whose other name was Catherine Mary, appeared again it was to bring supper, and a message from a poor woman that "She was taken cruel bad, and would Miss Muriel come to her?" Muriel left her after a terrible four hours. The fight had given her strength, and the light in her eyes was wonderful. She had forgotten all about the Lady of Shalott.

CHAPTER XXIV

"La vie est vaine:
Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de haine,
Et puis—bonjour!"

"REALLY, Mary, it's absurd to stay away from the picnic! And I simply can't go if you won't. That odious Mrs. Collins makes the most hateful chaperon, with her 'Come here, my dear!' just at the wrong moments. *Won't* you come, Mary?" Gladys, in the most delicate of Dresden flowered silks, with a huge hat one mass of pale pink roses and black velvet, looked imploringly at her companion.

She was a girl it was impossible to describe without mentioning her clothes. One felt if she had worn a yachting suit with gilt buttons she would have looked pathetic. Mary Huntly took one of the little hands in hers.

"The truth is, dear—but don't, please, tell Tom—I had a slight hæmorrhage this morning. Nothing much, it is true, but these tiresome lungs will bother me, and I know I ought to keep quiet to-day."

"You never used to be so fussy about your health, Mary," exclaimed the girl petulantly. There is nothing that so torments a brave woman as a gibe at nervousness. It was true that Mary had conquered her fear, but she knew it to be something that comes again, and would never while she lived cease to give up coming. She winced and let the girl's hand drop; she had not voice enough to explain. The persistent cruel healthiness of the girl before her aroused in her a kind of defiance.

"Since you are so keen, dear, I will go," she said, "but I hope they won't expect me to talk!" She laughed huskily.

"Tom is out shooting, isn't he?" she asked Gladys later as they walked towards the carriage which was to take them to their destination.

"How funny you are, Mary! You never used to be so interested in Tom's movements," laughed Gladys; "he won't be back, I don't suppose, till long after we are." An hour later, by a half-ruined temple, under the shade of great enshrouding trees, Jack Hurstly sitting beside Gladys asked her a little sharply if her cousin wasn't very seedy.

"Yes, poor dear!" said Gladys with the wistful, pathetic look that had helped to draw Mary to the picnic; "and she's so dreadfully plucky and determined, I couldn't persuade her to stay at home with me. I can't tell you how anxious it makes me feel!"

Jack's eyes grew tender over her. Hats of a certain shade cast sincerity in a becoming glow over an upturned face. He wanted to help her, protect her, comfort her! His vexation was transferred to Mary. It must be such a strain to go about with an obstinate, sick woman. Jim Musgrave sat by his aunt. All the rest had gone off somewhere—a general direction to which all picnics tend where there is no one to victimize the party with games. Gladys had promised to go and see an ancient well with Jim, and she had gone to see it—with Jack Hurstly; only Mrs. Collins and Jim sat with Mary. Suddenly she put her hand on his arm.

"Jim—take—me—home," she cried. It was the end of the picnic.

CHAPTER XXV

"God's Hand touched her unawares."

WHEN Tom Huntly rode home with a big bag of game after a satisfactory dinner with a crony it was nearly twelve o'clock. Yet to his surprise the whole house was lit up, and there was an uneasy sense of motion and confusion. He dismounted and called for a servant. Suddenly he heard a woman crying. He let the horse go and walked into the house.

"How can you expect me to go to her? No, I won't! I won't! Oh, it's horrid! it's terrible!—just when I was so happy too! No, doctor, go and sit with her till Tom comes! Oh, my God! . . . Doctor! here he is!"

"Where is my wife?" said Tom Huntly. The words sounded to his ears like a quotation; it was absurd to suppose they could be his. He did not look at Gladys, dissolved in frightened tears over the inappropriateness of the angel Death. The doctor spoke with the unreal cheerfulness of his profession.

"Another hæmorrhage, Major Huntly. It is over now, but you must expect to find her a little weak." Then, as Tom Huntly uncomprehendingly followed him, "It is my duty to tell you that I consider her case serious—very." A nurse stood by the bed fanning her. A sudden remembrance of the boy's birth (the boy at Eton) swept over him.

She looked very young, with that old, bright something in her eyes that the last ten years of the world had managed to dim. She whispered his name.

"Tom, come a little nearer." He knelt beside her, and put his arms around her. They had wasted a lot of time. "I wanted you so—Tom," she whispered. "It's been such a poor sort of thing, hasn't it? What we might have been to each other, I mean? But it's been all my fault, dear. I never knew a man that could have made me half—so happy. There are not many women who could say that of their husbands in our—world—are there, Tom?" She coughed till the slow breath came back. "So you'll not worry, Tom?" she gasped.

"Mary—Mary, darling—you won't leave me and the boy?" It was frightful this want of time. She smiled bravely.

"I'm so glad you care," she murmured. "Tell him—Tom—that his mother says she wants him to be—a gentleman—like his father." The nurse stepped forward, but the doctor shook his head.

"There is no need," he said, but he meant "There is no hope."

"Ah, Mary! Mary!" She opened her eyes again: she was much too tired to be frightened of death.

God takes the ignorant, plucky souls who have fought the good fight, not quite knowing why, very peacefully to Himself.

"I should like," she gasped, "more air." The nurse came towards her bed with the fan in her hand, but before she could reach her a gust of wind strangely cool and fresh swung the curtains of the window, and Mary Huntly was dead, having passed from a life which stifled, limited and kept back all the highest and noblest in her to beyond the horizon where "Over all this weary world of ours breathes diviner air." The room was very quiet and still. The doctor after a few words to the nurse, engaging her for another case, went off to his quarters.

Gladys composed two heart-broken notes to Jack Hurstly in her sleep, and Tom Huntly left alone with the body of the woman he loved fought the old fight with the grimness of things.

CHAPTER XXVI

"And Memory fed the Soul of Love with tears."

"Too late!" is a phrase holding the eternal knell of life. It sounds like a muffled peal even to those who hear it lightly said. To those who have lived through it, the worst of the battle passes before their eyes again. Many, perhaps blissfully, miss all that it means. They dare not, or cannot, face remorse. That they themselves have pulled down their house about their ears seems to them an infamous impossibility. They forget all their own cruel words, long neglect and unfair judgment, and only remember flashes of sunlight which they connect—probably quite falsely—with themselves. Their "yesterdays look backward with a smile."

Gladys never realized even as much as a tinge of shame. She cried a great deal. Mary knew how to manage things so beautifully, and, better still how to manage Tom. There was a certain heavy awkwardness about Tom that Gladys didn't like. It had the effect of putting her in the wrong, which was, on the face of it, absurd. Also he wouldn't do what she wished without coarsely asking "Why." Altogether, Mary had taken the edge off a difficulty; and Gladys hated difficulties almost as much as she did explanations.

It was so dreadfully trying, too—Mary's dying just then! Another week, perhaps, and it would not have mattered so much. The thought forced her to look into the glass. The crying had done no great damage; she would dress entirely in white. Jack would come round soon after breakfast to find out how Mary was. Oh, poor Mary!

There was something so bald and primitive and earnest about death; *whatever* happened she would not be taken to see the body. She went out into the dining-room. Suddenly she began to be afraid of meeting Tom.

Tom had passed the night of a thousand years; it comes once or even twice in a lifetime. He was looking very old and haggard. When Gladys came into the room he winced as if he had touched a snake. It was a very awkward meeting. Tom would have gone out of the room and said nothing, but there was breakfast—and the servants. By-and-bye there was only breakfast, and Gladys sitting where Mary used to sit. She was thinking that at least he might have shaved, and wondering if she dared to speak to him. It was very hot and still.

"Did you know that Mary had had a hæmorrhage before?" he asked in the dangerously level tones of passion curbed. Gladys burst into tears.

"How can you speak of her in that heartless way, Tom?" she cried. He gave a queer little sound that might have been a laugh.

"Answer me," he said. The question was how much did he know, and what was the safest lie? He saved her the trouble. "Very well, you did know, then! Now how long has this been going on?"

"It was easy enough to keep it from you, Tom!" she said, with the brutality of a weak thing cornered. "You never took the trouble to find out. Poor Mary made me promise not to tell you. She told me first in England that her temperature rose every night, but that she didn't intend to make herself an invalid for that. She said you were the sort of man who hated invalids." Tom broke a paper-cutter he had been playing with on the table. "I don't know how many hæmorrhages she had—not very many; certainly not one for a long time——"

"Certainly not one yesterday morning," he interrupted slowly, a little pause between each word. "Before you went to the picnic?" Gladys looked desperately at the paper-cutter. There was something in the psalms about a green bay-tree that occurred to her, not of course in connection with herself.

"No, she never said so. She wanted particularly to go to the picnic; she said (who was it that said women are no inventors?) that she would be so dull without you. I tried to persuade her not to go, but she would——"

"I wonder," said Tom meditatively, "how many lies you have been telling me? Don't get angry, it really isn't worth while, and it doesn't matter in the least, you know, only you had better save some for your old age. You can pack your things, as we are going home next week." He rose drearily from the table and made his way out of the room; he cared so very little about anything.

He felt as physically tired as after a forced march. An endless expanse of days and months and years passed before his eyes—there seemed so much time now.

Suddenly he thought of the boy!—Mary's boy and his. He straightened himself up; there was still somebody left to do that for. For Mary's sake he would devote himself to the boy; it was tremendously worth while. He sat down and painstakingly wrote a letter that made his own tears come and the boy's when he read it, and drew the two together as nothing but sorrow and loneliness and love can ever do. It followed so naturally and plainly that if Mary wanted her son to be like his father, the father must try to be a better sort of chap. Remorse receded, and took with it the burden of hopelessness.

CHAPTER XXVII

"She was beautiful, and therefore to be wooed:
She was a woman, and therefore to be won."

GLADYS went into the garden, where it was coolest and shadiest, and sat, a lovely and pathetic figure, leaning, it is true, against a cushion with her listless hands in her lap.

So Captain Hurstly found her. She had written the little heart-broken note, and she rose to meet him with quivering lips.

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" she murmured—in an abandonment of grief Christian names fall so naturally, and it sounded very sweet to Jack—"how good of you to come!"

"Good of me?"—he held both her hands; she had given them to him unconsciously—"I think it was awfully sweet of you to see me—I'm so sorry, dear—so sorry!" The tears rolled down her cheeks. She looked very pretty when she cried, and it was very difficult not to kiss her.

"Mary was everything I had in the world," she said withdrawing her hands with a swift blush, and sinking back on the cushions again—"mother, sister, friend. And Tom—Tom has been so brutal to me Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do!"

"Tom brutal to you?"

"Yes! he hates me. I'm sure I don't know why. Perhaps he feels now he might have done more for Mary. She told me often how terribly lonely she was before I came to her. We are to go back to England next week, and I know too well what that means!"

"What does it mean?" he asked looking at her long and carefully, the white dress that fell away from the little fair throat, the pathetic quiver of the dainty mouth, the hopeless, hunted look in the big dark eyes.

"Oh, I can't tell you!" she cried with a sudden gasp. "Don't—don't ask me!"

"I must know," he said firmly; "tell me, please." The color swept over her cheeks, her eyes faltered and fell before his, her hands trembled in her lap.

"Tom wants me to marry," she said at last, "a man I can never—love." She covered her face with her hands. "Go away!" she cried piteously. "Isn't it hard enough already without making me tell—you!" She gasped the word containing her passionate heart. She was in earnest now, that was why she hid her face; she knew that she would not be so pretty.

The word that fell in the hot still morning lived ever afterwards in Jack's mind with the heavy scent of tropical flowers, the restless quiver of the air, and the sharp metallic stroke of a coppersmith's beak near by. She was unhappy, and pretty, and clinging—and she loved him. Had he any right to make her love him so, and then leave her to a bitter and miserable marriage? So pity spoke, and the beauty of the girl's lithe form, the curl of hair just escaping the uplifted hand, the delicate scent she used, the whole scene with its setting of the old hot Indian garden spoke to passion. And when pity and passion speak at the same moment, reason, sense, and self-control fade fast away. He took her hands from her face; she looked at him as a startled child would look; he felt the beating of her heart; he drew her closer to him, and she made no resistance.

"Gladys, Gladys, will you be happy with *me*, darling?" he asked her.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, "you never even asked me—if I loved you!"

An hour later, radiant, triumphant, cruel, Gladys stood before Tom Huntly.

"I am not going back to England with you," she said. "I am going to marry Jack Hurstly. I shall stay with Mrs. Collins till the wedding, and come home with Jack, for good." Tom Huntly looked at her, alive and young! and upstairs lay the body of his wife, and the girl could be so happy!

"Are you quite heartless?" he asked wearily. The insolence of her joy turned to weak self-pity, and she began to cry again.

"Oh, poor, poor Mary!" she sobbed. "She *so* wanted to help me choose my trousseau!" Tom left the room, shutting the door after him.

Jack went back to his quarters. He wondered why the scent she wore seemed so familiar. He remembered at last that Edith le Mentier had used it too, and he remembered at the same time with equal irrelevancy that Muriel never used scent.

That evening he had a long talk with Tom Huntly. His friendship with Mary had been a deep and real one, and he thought Gladys must have been mistaken about Tom's brutality. He was not that sort of man; and he thought Tom was equally mistaken when he said rather doubtfully, "I hope you will be happy with Gladys; she's not half up to the form of that other girl of yours."

Any reference to Muriel was peculiarly irritating to him just now.

It also seemed that people who knew Gladys very well did not appreciate her so deeply as people who knew her slightly—a trait which is certainly a trifle unfortunate in a man's future wife. But he had burned his boats, and he remembered how pretty she was, and tried to think it very natural that the day after his engagement he should find his *fiancée* playing love-songs on the piano to her very distant connection, Jim Musgrave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Is she not pure gold, my mistress?"

JIM looked at his uncle and said nothing. The two men were smoking on the piazza. It was late evening, the day before Major Huntly was to sail for England. He had just mentioned Gladys' engagement, and found that his nephew knew nothing about it. Jim grew rather white, and the two puffed steadily at their pipes again.

"She ought to have told you," said his uncle at last. "Does it make a lot of difference?"

"Yes," said Jim laconically.

"I don't want to bother you, old fellow, but I think I ought to know did she give you any reason to think——" Jim shook his head.

"No—I was simply—a fool," he said shortly; and then he added with a rather bitter smile "she wasn't."

"But now, you know," said his uncle, "you'll shake it off, I hope; there's as good fish in the sea, you know, as ever came out of it."

"And they can stay there," said Jim.

"But you don't mean you still care for her?"

"Yes, sir, I always shall—whatever she does!"

The night was radiant. Full in the starlit sky the moon poured forth a clear stream of light, bringing out the colors of the world thinly, not as the sun does, but with a strange, mystic richness all her own. The two men had not poetic temperaments. Nights and moons and stars were much alike to them, and they were not thinking just then so much of each other's sorrows, chiefly of their own. Yet there was a very warm feeling of sympathy between them, and they sat for some time longer smoking in silent fellowship. At last Jim rose to his feet.

"I shall be on duty to-morrow, sir," he said, "so I'm afraid I shan't see you again. You'll drop me a line when you've reached home, and tell me how you find the little chap?"

"Yes, Jim. I say, old fellow, I wish Mary was here to-night, she'd know what to say to you. I'm afraid I shall only make a mull of it—you've faced your guns pluckily about Gladys—don't take it too hard; and if I could do

any good at seeing your colonel about getting you some shooting leave ——"

"Thank you, sir," Jim interrupted; "it's awfully good of you. I think perhaps there's an opening for me to go to the front again, a fellow of 'ours' is taken with enteric out there. I'll get along all right—and you know what I feel about aunt Mary. She was too good a woman to make me lose my faith in them, and it wasn't Gladys' fault, sir—it was all mine. You won't blame her, will you?"

"Oh, I won't blame her," said his uncle shortly—"good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir," and Jim, sternly setting his shoulders with all an Englishman's passionate determination to suppress his emotion, passed out into the night.

It was the same beautiful world when earlier in the evening he had enjoyed a talk with his lady-love, and had said that he thought the world was really "an awfully jolly place."

He would believe no wrong of her now—it is love's creed for the young—only the world was a beastly hole—that was all; and it was hard lines on a chap to have to come into it whether he would or no. His grief rushed him into metaphysics, an unknown quality to Jim, and he felt more himself again when he had applied for leave—and got it—to be sent to one of the most unhealthy parts of India where there was a little row on.

CHAPTER XXIX

"What matter how little the door, if it only lets you in!"

PARIS, always in a glitter, struck both Cynthia and Geoffrey as being almost too emphatically the same.

They separated after the dear, delicious lightness of the earliest French meal, one to go to the studios and try to get a skilled but unpractised hand in again, the other whimsically to the lecture-rooms, an atmosphere congenial, but thin and uncolored to one fresh from the active fight. So the first week passed, and quite unconsciously they began to imbibe the gay French surface, the triumphant shrug at the disagreeable, the bright intensity of the absorbing present. It was not that they forgot or felt less, but as if straight from the seriousness of the downstairs rooms they had strayed into the nursery and were playing at being children again. It was one morning on her way to the studio that Cynthia met an old acquaintance of hers, an emphatic American girl, who exclaimed in the arresting tones of her countrywomen:—

"Why, Cynthia Grant, is that you!" Cynthia turned smiling.

"Millicent!" she said, "in Paris?"

"Why, certainly," laughed Millicent gayly; "didn't you know I was married. I couldn't keep it up any longer. You remember Clifton Perval? He was that set! I *had* to give in to him! But come right away home with me, Cynthia; I've the most perfectly lovely flat you ever saw!" Cynthia felt suddenly human.

"All right," she said, "I'll give myself a holiday. So you are actually *living* in Paris. You always wanted to, didn't you?"

"*Want* to? I was just crazy. But I let my husband know I'd be planted *here* or nowhere! So we just came. Launcelot will be just as pleased to see us— —"

"Who is Launcelot?" laughed her friend.

"My little boy. Why, didn't I tell you?" Her bright, keen face clouded a little. "Yes, I've got a child." She paused flatly, and then fell back with ready gush on an easier line. "Don't you think Launcelot a real pretty name? I told Clifton I'd take nothing common. No William-George effects for me! So his name is Launcelot Cummins Perval. Cummins was my name, you

remember, before I married. Oh, here we are. Now isn't it a charming location? It's so sweet and central." Cynthia nodded.

They were taken up almost to the top of a high building. The flat was evidently small and inexpensive. As they entered Cynthia was struck with the effect of an aggressive effort to conceal. Everything seemed unnaturally placed so as to hide something else, and to block views. There were a quantity of unnecessary things, and some very bad pictures. Millicent had never had much art though she had a great deal of talent, but the talent had deteriorated and the art vanished.

Sitting on the floor, his head a mass of dark curls, with wide, blue, astonished eyes, was a little fellow of about six, in quaint, tight black velvet trousers. He looked at his mother wistfully.

"You said he would come back," he exclaimed sorrowfully; "but he hasn't for hours and hours!"

"Why, Launcelot, how silly you are," cried his mother; "come here, right away, and shake hands with this lady. Aren't you *glad* to see mother come home so soon?"

The child rose obediently and advanced towards Cynthia. His eyes were heavy with the difficulty to express his thoughts, his eyebrows were knitted painfully. Cynthia's eyes grew tender as they met his.

"What have you lost, sonnie?" she asked gently.

"Oh, it's Tony that's goned away," he began eagerly.

"The child's bird escaped out of the window this morning," his mother explained contemptuously; "Marie opened the cage, or something. The thing squealed awfully; it's rather a relief. Now, Launcelot, you go back to your bricks, and mother will give you some candy by-and-bye." But Cynthia held the child's hand.

"I want to hear about Tony," she said firmly. The boy's eyes were full of tears, but he controlled himself manfully.

"If God has taken him," he said, "I think it's very selfish. God has birds and birds, and I only had Tony."

"Why, Launcelot Perval," exclaimed his mother in shocked tones, "whatever do you mean? You're a very naughty boy to talk so; mother'll have to punish you if you say such things." The boy ignored his mother. She might have been an intrusive fly. He brushed her away. Cynthia understood.

"But perhaps God didn't take him," she suggested thoughtfully. The boy's face brightened, but clouded again.

"He lives in the sky," he said; "and that's where Tony went. He must have flown straight to God, and I think God *ought* to have sent him back," his lips quivered again. "I've waited hours and hours," he repeated mournfully.

"God has got such a lot of things to do," she said, "perhaps He will send him back to-morrow. Don't you think you could wait till to-morrow, Launcelot?"

"Why, really, Cynthia," laughed her friend, "I can't let you encourage the child in such notions. Now, look here, Launcelot, if you will be a good boy, and not worry any more, I'll ask papa to buy you another Tony." She was a good-natured woman, but she missed the point.

"Oh, but there isn't another Tony," he said looking at his mother reproachfully; "there aren't two mes nor two Gods, mama?"

"Oh, do be quiet, Launcelot," she cried falling back on the dense weapon of her authority; "of course there aren't two Gods. I shall send for Marie to take you away!"

This threat closed the discussion. The child went back to the window, and gazed wistfully at the roofs, still wondering at his unanswered prayer.

Millicent showed Cynthia her flat. Cynthia began to understand the pathetic concealments. They were very poor.

"We manage to have good times, though," Millicent explained. "We get around and see things. Men don't like women being *too* economical, and I don't believe in it myself. They just spend and spend, and then make a row over the bills. I don't see why we shouldn't spend too; it don't make much more of a row, for they put it down to us anyway! But it's very unfortunate our having that child!" She cast an impatient glance at the little fellow in his odd-shaped, out-grown clothes. "Sometimes I positively don't know which way to turn. His father and I don't know what to make of him—he's that funny! It doesn't rightly seem as if he was our child!"

"He's a dear little fellow," said Cynthia pityingly; "I wish you would let me take him home for this afternoon, I would bring him back at bedtime. I shall be all alone."

"Why, that's real sweet of you, Cynthia," said Mrs. Perval. "Clifton and I want so much to have a nice afternoon with some French friends of ours—Monsieur le Comte de Mouselle and his sister. He's the most perfectly charming man. Do you know him?" Cynthia shook her head. Millicent tittered. "He's just wild about *me*," she said, "but of course I know how to deal with him. *They* can't take me in, you bet! but I'll be real pleased," she added, seeing Cynthia's attention wander, "to let you have Launcelot for this

afternoon as soon as Marie can get him ready." Ten minutes later the two left the flat. Mrs. Perval, her hands on her hips, talking to them as they went.

"Now, Launcelot, be sure you're a good boy, and mind what you say. Cynthia, don't let him worry you—please. I'll be *real* pleased to see your brother again, Cynthia. Give him my love, and tell him——"

Whatever she was to tell him was lost on the way downstairs. Cynthia and the boy felt suddenly free, their eyes sparkled, they clasped each other's hands tightly—the world lay before them, the great glittering Paris world, rich with delights. A French-woman with bright, bright eyes passed them. The boy pressed a little closer to Cynthia.

"The streets roar so," he said fearfully. "Do you think it's at all likely there's any lions about?"

"They are always careful to shut them up," Cynthia explained, "when boys go out with friends."

They had a wonderful lunch and lots of marvellous French cakes, and if there were any lions they remembered that "friends" didn't like them, and kept within bounds. Cynthia felt for the first time that she could breathe without it hurting her. To be alive and separate is so terrible to love. The child's hand in hers made her look past herself into a world more beautiful and infinitely higher than her dreams.

CHAPTER XXX

"Oh; the light, light love that has wings to fly!"

Dr. Grant had not found the wrench of parting much easier than his sister, but, like many people with deep emotions, he had found room enough to keep his unhappiness apart from his everyday work and appearance, and to take a certain amount of placid enjoyment out of his new mode of living. The difficulty was in completely deceiving Cynthia by the constant holiday aspect she expected of him. Sometimes the shadow fell between them, and they would be silent and apart, then both would bitterly blame themselves, pity each other, and rush back into the holiday aspect again. They would have been far happier if they had been less reserved.

It was about six when Geoff, returning to their apartments, heard the noise of talk and merry laughter in his sister's room. He opened the door hastily to find Cynthia on her knees before the fire roasting chestnuts with a curly-headed youngster, who laughed the more at his appearance, as if it were a part of the game.

"This is the Knight Sir Launcelot," said Cynthia gravely, waving her hand towards the boy. "Launcelot—the King!" Launcelot nodded.

"I always 'spected him," he said earnestly, "and now God must have sent him instead of Tony. Do you think kings are nicer than birds?" he added anxiously to Cynthia.

"Not most of them," said Cynthia preparing to shell a hot chestnut; "but mine's a very nice king, as nice as any bird I should think."

"Things when they're *very* nice fly away," puzzled the thoughtful knight; "if kings *was* as nice as birds they might fly too!" He drew down his brows and gazed at the solid and substantial doctor. "But you—you don't look as if you was a very flying person," he finished triumphantly. "Would you like a chestnut?" The doctor accepted one with enthusiasm, and Launcelot, the king and the woman with red hair spent a charming and exciting evening.

They only parted at bedtime at his mother's door on the express understanding that he was to come again the next day, and that knights never even under the hardest circumstances cried, and that last, but not least, the coal-black charger with a stiff neck under the king's coat transported thither from a fairy shop must be shown without delay to Marie, daddy and the

cook. These facts being grasped the worst was over, and the knight, strewing wet kisses in his wake, was borne away to bed, leaving his volatile mother expressing shrill-voiced thanks to Cynthia and Geoff. The streets seemed ten times brighter and less chilly to the doctor and his sister, and they went to a screaming French farce for the rest of the evening, and felt much the better for it. In fact they even forgot for a while their determination to enjoy themselves.

After this it became the custom for Launcelot to go to Cynthia every afternoon and stay with her till evening. Millicent was always grateful, but frequently hurried—more hurried even than an American woman in Paris generally is. She did not refer again to the charming Count and his sister, but one day she told Cynthia that "Clifton had gone away."

"For how long?" asked Cynthia quietly. Millicent stared, then she sat down and laughed. She laughed for a long while, but not very merrily. Finally she explained with a blank terseness.

"He's just quit; he's gone! he's left me. Don't stand there and stare, Cynthia. Sit down. We didn't have a very good time together." She continued pacing restlessly up and down the little tawdry room. "He was always the sort of man that wanted a good time, and we didn't have much money. After the child came, you know, it was worse than ever. I wasn't going to play the door-mat to Clifton, but I did my best to make it pretty." She looked at the little concealments, ragged and thin in the heartless Paris sunshine, and they looked more pathetic than ever. "And I dressed real well, but there wasn't any keeping him. He only told me I was ruining him with dressmakers' bills, though he knew I make the most of my own clothes! Sometimes I wish I hadn't been so cock-sure about Paris. In America there'd have been something to keep him back, but there's nothing to keep one back in Paris. Things look as innocent and pretty——" her voice broke; "but they aren't, Cynthia—they're real mean! they're real mean!" Cynthia sat silently gazing at the carpet. The nervous, breaking voice, the frightened, restless figure were not lost upon her. They seemed familiar somehow, quite as if she had seen them before; and the ring of pain in the most meagre phrase "But they aren't—they're real mean! they're real mean!" voiced a feeling that had once been part of her without a voice. She waited for the inevitable sequel. It came in a burst of hysterical sobs. "He left me a note, Cynthia—Clifton did—he said I should know where to look for consolation!"

"The brute!" cried Cynthia. Millicent laughed.

"Well! don't you know they're all that way when a man is tired. Nothing will keep him; and then he wants to throw a sop to something, maybe he

thinks it's his conscience, so he invents another man for the woman he's left —if—if there isn't one already."

"Millicent," Cynthia stood up, and took the pretty, heavily ringed hand in hers, "do you think the second man will bring you anything better than the first? He never does—the only difference is he leaves you worse. Stick to your art and Launcelot!" Millicent tore her hands away.

"Pshaw! you're always talking about the child—I hate him!—there!—I hate him! I hated the pain, I hated being put aside, I hated having to spend my time on him—maybe if he hadn't come Clifton would have been different; maybe other things would have been different too! As for my art, as you call it, what is art to a woman? Why, it's nothing! you know it, Cynthia. If Leslie Damores hadn't played the fool——"

"Hush!" Cynthia stammered in a piteous attempt to hide the pain of his name.

"Well, then! If a man wanted you, I'd like to know what pictures would mean? Pictures! I may be weak and silly—I know I am—I loved my husband. Yes! I did! I know I did. But if I can't have him, I must have somebody. And you want me—to paint! Well! I'll tell you. I wanted to please Clifton—so I painted. Now the Count doesn't like the folks I mix with——" she bridled perceptibly, and Cynthia felt sick, "so I won't paint any more."

She looked at the clock. Cynthia gazed at her desperately; she heard Launcelot's voice in the next room. She had taught him "Sir Galahad," and his voice rose in a triumphant shout at the last words, "All arm'd I ride, whate'er betide, until I find the Holy Grail!"

"What are you going to do with the child?" she asked wearily. Millicent flushed. No woman is without the saving grace of feeling, through some chord, a touch of shame.

"The Count," she said, "says he'll send him to school; he's very kind."

"Very," said Cynthia dryly. "He will send him to a French school, where he will grow into a second Count—it's very kind of him. Millicent, if you have no other plan, will you give him to me?"

"To you!" said Millicent—"to you?" She was astonished. She was, after all, his mother, and even where motherhood brings no love it keeps its sense of property. "Why, Cynthia, I don't know as I *can*; you see, after all, I'm his mother! It's very kind of you, Cynthia—but——" She looked again at the clock.

"Look here!" said Cynthia suddenly, "I'm not going without the boy. You had better make up your mind to give him to me. You don't want to ruin his life as well as your own, and if you don't let me have him——" Cynthia's eyes flashed. "He will be more in your way than ever now. I shall stay and—explain—to the Count!" she finished grimly. Millicent turned white.

"Oh, go!" she said. "For Heaven's sake go, and take the boy with you. I suppose you don't know what people will say! I suppose it doesn't matter to you that we all know why Leslie Damores didn't marry you. I suppose——"

"Oh, Lady Beautiful!"—the knight stood looking from one to the other at the door—"Lady Beautiful, do you know where it is?"

"Where what is, my darling?"

"The Holy Grail," said the knight wrinkling his brows. "I don't know where to find it." Cynthia took his hand.

"Let's go and look for it," she said; "it isn't here."

She hesitated, but Millicent stood at the window with her back to them. She put her hands to her hair and replaced a pin. Cynthia turned with the boy, and together they left the little tawdry flat for the last time; left the strange, sad life with its shattered opportunities and sordid concealments; left his mother standing by the window waiting for the Count.

CHAPTER XXXI

"Where He stands,—the Arch Fear
In a visible form."

"IT is absolutely necessary you should come to me at once. I am extremely ill.

"YOUR UNCLE."

This brief but characteristic epistle rung in Muriel's head as she left the club for the night. It was a trying time to leave the work. She had almost a settlement now of new helpers, men and women, all under her headship, devoted and earnest workers, but needing direction, and a firm, experienced hand. Cyril Johnstone had volunteered to come to her. Association with her having convinced him that she was neither light-minded nor superficial, and that in spite of his exalted office he still had something to learn from a woman. Captain Hurstly having withdrawn his liberal subscription, the club-work in his parish had fallen through, and the old, broad-minded, empty-headed vicar could jog on in peace to his grave with a sly chuckle or two at the fizzling out of modern efforts.

Meanwhile honest hard work and the buffeting experience of the working-man had opened the young curate's mind and sobered his heart, and there is no such worker in any cause as the disciplined enthusiast.

Muriel was happier about her work than she had ever been. It was only right, according to her ethics, that as satisfaction dawned the new call should come. She did not know what her uncle's illness meant, but she settled work for the next few weeks, had a final talk with her new associate, and putting on what she called her society dress drove off in a hansom to her uncle's. She found him in the comfortable stage of a dressing-gown and hot chocolate. He closed his eyes as she entered the room.

"Muriel, is that you?"

"Yes, dear; I came at once."

"If you had not come it would have been too late! Muriel shut the door!" Muriel shut the door. The room was very warm, and the bright winter sunshine lit up the gold in her hair, and brought out the smile which was always latent in her eyes. She sat down by him and took his hand.

"Have they made your chocolate nicely?" she asked.

"Never! Of course they haven't. I am infamously neglected. My slightest wish is thwarted. I am not master in my own house, Muriel! That is why I sent for you. You at least, before you became so selfish and absorbed in your own pleasure, knew how to look after my comfort. The doctor says I must on no account move. I suffer agonies from my foot, and if anything was to upset me the gout might fly to my heart! Yet though I have spoken about it again and again, they *will* leave skin on my hot milk!"

"Shall I make you some more chocolate, and boil the milk myself?" asked Muriel smiling. He growled an affirmative. And Muriel, chatting brightly about his favorite topics, made him fresh chocolate, and lightened the room by certain little readjustments of flowers, books and cushions that the eyes of the most diligent of servants always just miss over, as if to prove that self-help smiles after all.

Sir Arthur Dallerton had aged terribly. Death's hand rested upon so much that was mortal. It is only in such cases that death is dreadful. Muriel, who had so often seen it, thought she had never seen it more sadly, for in his eyes was the haunting fear from which there is no escape. Later on in the evening he called her to him. She had been singing over some old Scotch airs. She came and sat on a footstool at his feet, with her head on his knee. He liked to stroke her hair and hold her hand; it gave him a sense of peace and security.

"Muriel," he said, "do you think there is any chance of—anything happening to me?" The verb "to die" is terrible to some people. Sir Arthur Dallerton preferred the evasion of something happening.

"Why, no, dear; what should—happen?" said Muriel smiling. "Things—sad things might cease to happen for you; but that would be beautiful, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, Muriel, I don't want to die! I am afraid! afraid!" His voice rose almost to a scream. She stroked his hand and soothed him as if he were a frightened child.

"There, there, dear heart! it won't hurt you, see; there isn't any death, or anything to be afraid of, surely! Only light, peace and rest, dear uncle, and all the beautiful, lovely things of earth quite free, and nothing to hurt any more!"

"Oh, Muriel, child, do you think I shall see people whom I've come across in life? Oh, it's awful!" The poor, silly, selfish life, held hopelessly before his eyes by the Inexorable Reality, made him catch his breath. The girl's heart sank, but she spoke with firm assurance.

"We shall meet nothing that we can't bear—nothing that is too hard for us—for God is just as strong to save after death as before."

"But if there isn't any God, if there's only an awful grave? Oh, Muriel, it's a dreadful thing to be an old man!" He shivered from head to foot, and she nestled closer to his side.

"The body dies, and never feels anything; it's just a sleep, and it will never dream, or wake, or fret and trouble any more, and we believe that the spirit is safer without it, and close to God," she murmured.

"I'm not so sure of that," said her uncle sharply. "Some spirits can't help it. They're no better than they should be, and what do you think happens to them?"

The blind cannot see. It is a scientific fact and a living reality; the nearest they can reach to sight is to feel that they do not see as much as they might see, and they dim that view by the cry of the eternally inadequate "I can't help it."

Muriel pressed her lips to the poor human hand.

"Dear uncle, such spirits must be made as well as they ought to be. We must trust God for the method, for we can't know what is best; but I am quite sure God meant us all for His, and if we hold fast to that we shall grow like Him in time, and He will give us time, for there is all eternity for us to go on being good in if we have made the start."

"You'll never leave me, Muriel? Promise you will never leave me!" There was a moment's pause, while she looked into the fire and watched the red-hot coal grow black and drop to ashes in the grate.

"I'll never leave you, dear," she said at last. "And you won't be afraid any more?" she questioned. "I shall sleep right in the next room to you if you want me. You won't be afraid?"

"No, child! It's been very lonely without you, and they're very thoughtless about my chocolate. But you don't think there's any—hell, do you?"

"Oh, no, dear; I am quite sure there's not. Now don't you think I'd better ring for Thomas to carry you to bed, and I'll see that the cook does your broth nicely."

"You may if you like," he said grudgingly; "and mind you come to bed early, and come to me the moment I call you."

"Yes, dear, I will," and she kissed him gently.

"You're a good child," he murmured sleepily. Just as she closed the door he called her back. "Muriel!"

“Yes, uncle.”

“Are you sure about what you just mentioned, you know?”

“There’s nothing in all the world or out of it but God, be very sure,” she said with the passionate certainty of her faith.

He was not quite certain whether he liked that very much better either. But his broth was just as he wished that evening, and he did not call her in the night for he passed away peacefully in his sleep. And there was no dark left but his own soul, and even that with the hope of light in it passed into the eternal.

CHAPTER XXXII

"This cold, clay clod was man's heart:
Crumble it, and what comes next?—Is it God?"

MURIEL woke up to a new poverty and an extra ten thousand a year. The latter scarcely passed through her mind, but the former made her terribly lonely. Now there seemed nothing left, and the world a vast cold place void of personality.

She repeated three times over during a hurried, lonely breakfast that she had her work, and the post brought her two letters, one with Cynthia's Paris address, the other in a handwriting that drew all the blood to her heart. She put it aside and read Cynthia's. It told of her work and of Launcelot. The tone was softer than usual. Muriel was scarcely surprised when she read "Launcelot says his prayers every evening, and always goes to church on Sundays. So I do, too. His soul wants nourishment as well as his body, and I promised to take care of him. The other night Geoff took him to bed, and when I went up to look at them they were kneeling side by side looking out of the window. Launcelot has an idea that the Holy Grail is in one of the stars, and he is always looking for it. You have found it, Muriel, dear, and I am beginning to believe that some day I may find it too." She did not mention Leslie Damores; evidently he had not discovered her yet. Muriel hesitated to send him Cynthia's address; she believed it better for them both to wait.

Finally she took up the second letter. "Will you forgive me for writing to you? Gladys and I are married. We have left India for good, which means my profession dropped, you understand; but Gladys says there is no one to dress for in India. You'll think it awful cheek on my part, but she's very young yet, and you used to have a tremendous influence over her. I suppose you couldn't drop in now and then and give her a hint or two? I should like to see you awfully.—JACK."

Muriel carefully put the letter on a table, and sat with her hands on her lap gazing steadfastly into the fire. She saw three things, and she saw them plainly. One was that Jack did not love his wife, another that she, Muriel, had hardly forgiven Gladys, and thirdly that Jack would like to see her awfully. There was a dim, shadowy fourth, but this she brushed angrily

away; it hinted that there was more sunlight in the room than before she had read the letter.

Finally she drifted into a compromise it would do no harm to see Gladys. She wrote telling her of her loss and inviting her to tea the following week. She was very nervous when the afternoon came, and paced restlessly up and down the long reception room in her heavy black dress vexed with her expectancy, listening to the noises in the street. The sharp jingle of a hansom passing, hesitating, stopping, brought her to a chair.

Then came the sound of an electric bell, and a minute later the door swung open and a footman announced "Captain Hurstly, miss."

Muriel looked at him inquiringly. She did not appear in the least nervous now, for natures that tremble at a hindrance rise triumphantly to meet a calamity, and in a moment she realized that his presence was fully that.

"Gladys couldn't come at the last minute, and I did want to see you so, Muriel," he explained. He pleaded as he had always done, and he was just as handsome. She let these things have full weight with her before she spoke.

"Won't you sit down, Captain Hurstly; they will bring tea in a minute. I am sorry your wife could not come."

Jack looked at her with eloquent, grieved eyes, but she meeting them saw the coward in his soul, and her face hardened. He had not cared enough for her to remain unmarried, merely enough to desire a flirtation after marriage. She had not slept properly for three nights after she received his letter. He was the first to find the silence uncomfortable.

"I am not sorry she could not come," he said with a tender inflection; "I wanted to see you alone. It is a long while since I have seen you, Muriel. To me it seems desperately long, and yet you have not changed at all."

"You are mistaken, Captain Hurstly; I have changed a great deal. You also have altered considerably." Muriel's tone was convincing even to herself; she was beginning to believe she could after all bear it.

"It is true I have altered," he replied. "You alone might know how terribly, but I suppose it is never wise to follow a wrong by a folly. Only one can't help oneself when one's world, all that one has ever cared for, tumbles about one's ears. Oh, Muriel, how could you do it! how could you do it!" He was intensely in earnest; he could always be that at the very shortest notice. He stood in front of her looking down with the same passionate blue eyes which used to stir her heart, and yet when he met hers it did not seem as if he was looking down.

"If you have come to open a question forever closed between us, Captain Hurstly, and which your own honor and good sense should know to be doubly closed by your marriage, I must ask you to excuse me. I did not invite your wife to tea as a permission for you to insult me."

"You are right," he said looking at her with frank admiration; "you are always right, Muriel, without you I have forgotten how to be. Forgive me, I did not come here to upbraid you for ruining my life——"

"I should think not, indeed," Muriel interrupted scornfully.

"But to ask you to help me about Gladys. Are you my friend enough to wish to do that—Muriel?" She flushed painfully.

"I should like to help you," she said in a low voice.

"It's simply that she won't understand the danger of flirting with other men—every and any other man apparently," he explained; "and I don't want my wife to be a second Edith le Mentier." There was a pause; his illustration was unfortunate.

"You give her no cause to complain of you by your attention to the—first Mrs. le Mentier?" she could not forbear to ask.

"Muriel!" he cried. The protest was too vehement to be convincing. She rose and held out her hand.

"I will do all I can for your wife, Captain Hurstly—I am afraid it will be little enough—on one condition"—he waited anxiously—"that you will not attempt to see me again."

"You really mean it?" He spoke slowly, intensely. She never knew afterwards how she kept her hands from trembling.

"You have singularly forgotten the little you knew of me if you think I do not mean what I say, Captain Hurstly." She turned wearily to the door. He compared her in his mind with Edith le Mentier. Muriel was telling him to go away. She had told him to come back. Gladys was only a shadow in his life, a chained shadow; he did not even think of her at this moment. He had never depended on principles or considered consequences.

"Good-bye, then, Muriel," he said. "I suppose I must thank you for your promise, though its condition is terrible to me. You don't know what you may be driving me to!"

"Oh, I'm not driving you," cried Muriel desperately, the weakness of his nature dawning more fully on her; "drive yourself, Captain Hurstly—drive yourself!"

So he went, and was driven by some passion of irresponsibility from Muriel to Edith le Mentier. He found her in.

For Muriel there was just earth—weak earth—where her ideal had once made heaven for her.

It is not often we are brought into such sharp contact with our broken idols; if it were we should cease to make new ones—and that would be a loss.

Muriel stood face to face with the knowledge that she had been a fool—a girl with a dream—lie—hugged to her heart: and God help women who have to realize such dreams in the daylight of facts.

All she could find to say was that he was absolutely dead; she had not risen yet to see her deliverance. If the world had been empty before, now it was a blank. Those who die leave a sense of loss, but to know that one we loved has never lived is the greatest and most tragic emptiness of all. Muriel saw failure written over her heart. There was only one thing left: she fell on her knees and offered up her failure. So love passed away from her, but it left her on her knees.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"The black moments at end, the elements change."

It was early, and the sunlight with sharp shadows had a chilly and almost stage effect. The sky was dazzling over Notre Dame. Geoffrey Grant sat in the great church, watching the sunbeams catch up and glorify the dust. Worshippers and sightseers slipped in and out, and many candles gleamed.

The thought of Muriel had driven him there; and now he was alone with it, he thought half cynically how many had been driven there from the effects of unhappy love affairs, only they had called it aspiration. He at least was honest with himself; he knew it was Muriel.

In his early youth he had been embittered by a girl. It was the usual story of love and no money, and the girl had chosen not to wait. When success and good fortune came to him, he was indifferent to it. He treated all women with a sort of good-natured contempt, thinking them creatures of diseased nerves and hysterical affections. Necessary evils distinctly, but of the two perhaps more evil than necessary. His sister had been the one exception; he almost worshipped her. Then came her story. A crisis which he had passed through, by an extraordinary power, but once faced, he had resolutely killed, and hidden all traces of the past. His sister never knew what agony she had brought into his life. She believed that his perceptions were blunted, instead they were too delicate to be obvious; he had encased them in reserve, and bore without wincing because the worst pain stings into silence. Muriel had been a revelation to him, her gaiety was so spontaneous, her brightness so infectious. She had thrown her life, all dusty and human, into the glory of the sunbeam, and she was strong. He had watched her with Jack Hurstly, and he watched her afterwards. As a doctor her magnificent healthiness appealed to him. He could not imagine her having nervous prostration; as a man he marvelled at her. She knew that he loved her, yet she could look him straight in the eyes and be frankly friendly.

It had become the purpose of his life to strengthen their friendship into something more. For a long while he had struggled against it, but it was a passion that found grace with his whole nature; and, when he had come to the conclusion that strength lay in submission, Cynthia needed him, and he laid down his love and his work to face the Arch Fear of his life. If Cynthia should fail!

The last month had worn lines in his face, and his keen eyes in repose looked sadder than ever. He had fought, and the worst was over; he had watched and fenced, waited and listened, seized opportunities, avoided dangers, guided and guarded, and slaved that Cynthia should be safe and ignorant of his efforts. He had felt happier when Launcelot came, and this afternoon had left her with a mind at rest.

The figure of a woman with a child in her arms attracted him. She had evidently come a long way; she was tired and footsore, and very poorly dressed. He watched her buy a candle for the Virgin's shrine and kneel there till overcome with weariness, she slept, her head against a pillar, but even though she slept she clasped the child. He felt less impatience than usual with the wasteful, senseless candle-buying, and the love, the unconscious love of motherhood, and all things beautiful touched him closely. After all, he wondered, there was something strangely more than human in women who could give so much as Muriel and that mother. No physical passion could explain it all—it was so selfless, so extraordinary, so unnatural in another mood he might have called it, but here and now "supernatural" seemed the more fitting word. The baby stirred in its sleep, and the mother's eyes opened watchfully. She changed its position to a more comfortable one in her arms, then she made the sign of the Cross on its forehead, and crossing herself rose to her feet and left the church. The doctor rose too, and then, moved by an emotion he could never account for knelt and prayed. He smiled a little whimsically to himself. "Why, I believe I am becoming a Christian," he thought. But he had not changed; he was only beginning to see what all along the tremendous struggle of his life had been making him. People who are so much better than their creeds often wake up to find their creeds are higher than they dreamed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"I shall clasp thee again: and with God be the rest!"

He had found her! He repeated breathlessly to himself the one great fact. Leslie Damores had searched all their old haunts in Paris, had wandered and waited and watched, and now at last found her in a great class-room of French students. He had come as a special favor to the master in whose studio they worked, and he could not signal her out for more than a word, but by a clever clumsiness he knocked over her drawing-board. As he picked it up and gave it to her all the great unspoken things passed between them. It proved the mocking inadequacy of words that all he could say was "When may I see you?" and that she could only answer "After the class." The first blessed moment had gone, general criticisms had to be given, and French and English art discussed. An hour passed interminably; he could not always stand where the glint of red gold hair made of the studio a new heaven and a new earth. Then in a blessed skirmish of conflicting drawing-boards and parting chatter the class broke up, and somehow the master and the pupil found themselves once more in the streets of Paris, or the new Jerusalem. There was at that moment ridiculously little in a name. Their thoughts were only a happy chaos, and he could do nothing but repeat the only fact that mattered.

"I have found you at last," he said.

"I don't believe you ought to have looked for me," she replied gravely, for she was afraid.

"What made you run away, Cynthia?" he asked. She could give him any reason but the right one. She chose to deny the charge.

"I didn't run away," she said; "I merely wanted to come to Paris."

"Then why shouldn't I look for you?" cried Leslie triumphantly; "I merely wanted to come too."

"I don't know where we are going to," said Cynthia, looking at him to see if he was much altered.

"I don't think it in the least matters providing we go there together," laughed Damores. "As it happens, here's a cemetery; shall we go in and look at the tombstones?" Cynthia laughed as well. It was too absurd to think of death. There were lines in his face; he must have missed her a good deal.

They went into the cemetery together. A husband who had come to put some flowers on the grave of his dead wife thought them heartless. They were not heartless, they were only too happy to remember they had hearts at all.

"Now you have come, what are you going to do?" she asked at last. She could not meet his eyes now; the things they meant cried too loudly for an answer.

"I am going to marry you," he replied smiling, "if you'll let me. I don't think anything else matters just at present." Cynthia felt the color in great rebellious waves sweep over her face. She looked with unseeing eyes at the wreaths of absurdly artificial flowers.

"Do you fully realize what that means, Leslie?" she asked. "Can you face everything—everything?"

"Everything! everything!" said Leslie quietly, "with you; without you I cannot live my life. You are the best of everything I do. You never came to see my picture—it would have told you all. Once I made a tremendous mistake. It seems a crime when I look back. There is only one thing that can ever wipe it out. Cynthia, is it too late to ask you to be my wife, and overlook the past?" She could not speak, her heart thundered, and seemed to shake the ground she stood on.

God had given her a tremendous reward, a gift unspeakable after she had renounced what had been to her the very hope of joy, and from the lips of the man she loved pardon and oblivion swept her sin into the free, pure waters of love. She lifted up her eyes to him that he might read there all her heart and soul his eternally and for ever. For a long while silence came down and covered them. They turned at last, and slowly and without speaking left the place of tombs—the acre of God's sleeping ones. The man who had been stung by their laughter, seeing their faces again, recalled his injury. "After all," he thought, "they had their business here." And he was right, for love and death live in no separate houses.

CHAPTER XXXV

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp."
—Robert Browning.

Gladys was desperately unhappy. She had got what she wanted, and that, unfortunately, is frequently what follows. The unscrupulous get much, but they lose more; and Gladys, who had won her heart's desire, sitting in a beautifully furnished room before the photograph of the husband she adored, was weeping bitterly. From the first day of their marriage jars had arisen. He was hopelessly selfish about his personal comforts, but he had a certain tremendous code of honor of the sort that abhors a lie and connives at a betrayal. Gladys was given to frequent fibbing. He had been disgusted, and had not hidden it; she had been spiteful and pointedly malicious. Little bitter unspoken things rose up as their eyes met. Their honeymoon had not been a success. (An exacting woman and a selfish man should avoid honeymoons.)

Their home-coming was scarcely more so. They were both very extravagant in different directions, and they had no patience for each other's extravagances and no self-denial for their own; they were weak and obstinate over trifles. Gladys was extremely demonstrative and fond of talking; Jack cared very little for outward expressions of feeling, and preferred women who could hold their tongues. He was perfectly frank, and paid all his compliments to other women. Gladys lived on admiration, and if she could not get it from the man who ought to give it to her, she would try to draw it from the man who would. She found this very easy. A good many of her husband's brother officers admired her, and one of them, a Major Kennedy, frequently told her so.

She was crying bitterly now over a note that lay on her lap. It was an invitation to a dinner from Edith le Mentier to meet Major Kennedy. It mentioned her husband in a way that brought the angry color to her cheeks. She was beginning to understand, and the tears dried. She thought of what Major Kennedy had said of the way to treat husbands: "Give 'em a little wholesome indifference, and look round you; that's the way to whistle 'em back!"

After all, a woman might have a good deal of fun without any harm coming from it. Lots of married women did. Look at Edith le Mentier for instance—hateful thing! Yet no one could doubt that her husband was

devoted to her—and other women's husbands too! Her eyes flashed as she thought of Jack. She stamped her foot. "I'll pay them both out!" she cried, and she accepted Edith le Mentier's "delightful invitation."

Muriel called on Mrs. Hurstly later in the season. There was a moment's silence as the two women met. The room so daintily and beautifully furnished seemed filled with memories. Their eyes were drawn together to the photograph of Jack Hurstly in uniform. It was a curious coincidence that he had given to his wife the very photograph Muriel had returned to him. It was the only copy. Muriel withdrew her hand and sat down with her back to the photograph.

"And are you going to live in London?" she asked Gladys, studying the girl's face, the defiant sad eyes and peevish mouth, the fretful restlessness of the dainty figure. Pity was killing the last traces of her disappointment in her. Gladys returned her gaze curiously; she was thinking how becoming black was to Muriel.

"Oh, yes!" she said; "I suppose we shall practically live here. I hate the country, you know, except for house-parties, and Jack's estate is particularly dreary, I think. I hate 'estates,' they're like appropriated pews, one always wants to sit somewhere else! Have you given up your club craze yet? Your uncle's death must have made a lot of difference to you?" Muriel smiled.

"If you mean am I horribly rich? I'll admit it, but it will make the 'club craze' flourish more than ever, I expect. I have bought up three houses in Stepney and turned them into one for a settlement of workers. I am making arrangements now to enlarge the club, and in two or three weeks I shall go back to it." There was a slight pause. Gladys played with some violets in a stand. "Are you quite happy?" said Muriel at last very gently. "I hope, dear, you are quite happy?" It appeared to Gladys absurd to suppose she could possibly mean it, yet the tone sounded sincere.

"Happy?—of course we are! Why we have only been married a few months, and Jack has discovered I wear my own hair and keep my own complexion, and I am reassured as to the harmlessness of his habits and the extent of his income. What more can one ask?"

"Those in themselves might add to your unhappiness if you were so already, but they could scarcely succeed in *making* you happy, I am afraid," said Muriel quietly.

"Wouldn't *you* be happy with—Jack?" questioned Gladys. Sorrow, if it doesn't increase tenderness, tends to brutality. Muriel met her eyes calmly.

"No," she said slowly, "I do not think I should be quite happy—with Jack." She did not refer to their broken engagement. Gladys expected her to,

and was touched.

"It was horrid of me to say that," she said, "if you still care for him, and rude of me if you don't."

"I don't think you either rude or horrid," said Muriel quietly, "only not quite happy. I am very sorry for you, dear, because, though I don't care for Jack as I did, he made me very miserable once." Gladys pulled two violets to pieces on her lap. Muriel shivered; she hated wanton destruction of anything, and she loved flowers.

"I have behaved very badly to you," said Gladys at last in a low voice. "It was I that helped Edith le Mentier make trouble between you and Jack."

"You loved him so?" asked Muriel gently. Gladys burst into tears.

"I don't know why you should treat me like this," she sobbed, "for I did my best to ruin your life, and I would again to get—Jack!" Muriel took her in her arms; all her old love and pity returned to her.

"It would make no difference to me if you did," said Muriel; "I should only be sorry for you. Tell me what's the matter?"

"He doesn't care! he doesn't care!" she wailed. "I don't believe he ever did, and now he's gone back to that hateful woman again. Why shouldn't *I* amuse myself if I want to? He doesn't love me, and—and other people do!" Muriel's face grew stern with pain. If she had wished for revenge it was at her feet, but with all her soul she sorrowed for the wreckage of two lives.

"I don't think you are quite yourself," she said. "If you love Jack, you know he is the only other person there is. He must have cared for you as well, or he wouldn't have married you, dear. So put the other people quite away, and smile, and wear your prettiest clothes. You will find Mrs. le Mentier quite a secondary consideration. Why, she isn't even pretty! Jack only goes to see her because you won't be nice to him. Now have you been quite nice to him? Given up yourself in all the little ways, that he might give himself up to you in the great ways? Remember men are like children: you must put their toys away, and bring them out again at the right times, and not fret them about unnecessary things. Now, put on some of the dear violets and come home to tea with me!" Gladys looked at her suspiciously. Muriel laughed. "There's nothing I want to get out of you!" she cried; "and you are no use to me whatever. *Now*, will you come?" Gladys had the grace to blush; an impulse to trust the girl she had wronged moved her. She gave her a letter to read and went out of the room to get her things on. Muriel read the letter standing, then she went to the window and sat down.

She felt very tired. It is not so much of a surprise to find the outwardly barbarous with angel hearts, as to see the delicate and finished products of a

noble civilization inwardly corrupt. The letter was from Major Kennedy. There are times when conditional immortality seems the only safeguard of heaven. Muriel felt too miserable almost to breathe. There come moments in the brightest lives of blank depression. The greatest effort she ever made was to take Gladys back to tea with her. That evening Jack Hurstly dined at home, and his wife burned an unanswered letter.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"There is still sun on the wall."

"So Launcelot is to go to school, and Cynthia is to be married, and you are to be left all alone?" asked Muriel smiling as she handed Geoff a cup of tea. She had handed him a good many cups of tea since he had been back in England.

"I am to be left all alone," repeated the doctor, looking at her steadily.

"I have been practically alone ever since I can remember," said Muriel suddenly, "but I have seldom been lonely. In fact I often think it is only the people who don't live alone who *are* lonely. They are always trying to be understood, to break through barriers and live on a common level, and there's no such chance, for the more one shares the little things the more pitilessly isolated the big things make us. It is so dreadfully inadequate that tantalizing partial help one gets from others."

"There I think you are wrong," he said looking quietly across at her. "It's the whole loaf theory you're defending. You might just as well say a man had better have no legs than one, or could be as active without a crutch as with one, simply because he can't be very active anyway. We all want what help we can get, and it is not the least necessary for people to understand us to help us. Children are the greatest help. People who know that we want the moon may be wise enough to tell us it is only a worn-out world of rocks, but people who can't fathom our desires can still help us by telling us it is beautiful. It is one of the first lessons doctors learn to help patients to help themselves. In fact it is the greatest good we or anybody else can do."

"Yet you don't say that the most ignorant doctors are the best?" she prevaricated.

"No! because sympathy of that kind without knowledge is sympathy without a backbone. Physical cases require the definite as a foundation, but when one deals with the invisible, love comes first, not knowledge. Ignorant mothers mean more to their children than thoughtful scholars could—even if they do slap them occasionally. A man or woman without a home, if they have no jars and frets, must miss the influence of it, and feel the horrible loneliness of life." He so intensely meant what he said that Muriel felt she had been flippant, and yet his seriousness made her long to be more so.

"Birds who sit on telegraph wires, and can fly away from the line of communication whenever they want to, are more to my liking," she said.

"You forget that the birds have nests," suggested the doctor smiling.

"And you that we don't have wings," sighed Muriel. "And we can't change our mates every spring; when we choose we choose for life, expecting the better—and getting the worst!"

"Not always," said Geoff quietly.

Muriel felt angry; she could not tell why. She had never talked in this strain before; she felt vicious with the universe, and its representative opposite her made her worse; besides she had just been to see Gladys.

"If there was an alternative we would take it," she said. "But half of us women are brought up in such a lackadaisical way that there's no use for us. When we have brains and opportunity we are generally physically handicapped. People don't cut the woman who works now—they shrug their shoulders at her, and that's worse! As for resources (they advise resources, you know, after one's reached twenty-six), they are an outlet for wasted powers, a puny outlet, a mere compromise with failure! Oh! I've seen it again and again, dozens of times, capable, efficient girls brought up to be perfectly, daintily useless! After the schoolroom is over they get a dress allowance—and practise on the piano. Their heads must be full of something, so then come the rubbish—heaps of life, silly curates, silly extravagances, or piteously futile old maidhood! They keep us from being trained for anything else because they want us to marry, but all the other trainings help towards that the more one learns the more fit one is to teach. Self-reliance, good judgment and a sense of proportion are not out of place in a wife, and motherhood is only a word without them." The doctor laughed.

"Train your enterprising exceptions," he said; "perhaps in time they'll give the average woman a lift, but I don't go all the way with you by any means. You over-estimate women because of one or two women you have met who stand mentally above their race. Average women at present haven't brains enough to seize opportunities or to apply sensible educations. Domesticities or resources, and a silly curate or two, are just what they can appreciate, and good, solid hard work what they wish to avoid. I don't say women lack brains, but as a rule they lack depth and continuity. They have very little of the mental soundness, even the clever ones, that the average man has as a matter of course. They don't concentrate, and they're altogether too personal to make much headway in the professions. You needn't look as if you wished to annihilate me, Miss Muriel—I've no doubt

you could—but I believe it to be a fact that women as a whole haven't got physical or intellectual stamina enough for public life, and all the education and opportunities in the world will never give it to them!"

"But we're only beginning," cried Muriel. "See how far we've got already."

"That's the worst argument you have got against you," said the doctor smiling. "You are *too* quick to be natural; you work in spurts with reactions—growth, *real* growth, is a much slower affair. But even granting you that you have been kept back, you simply can't be *more* mentally than you have physical strength for, and as long as you are labelled women, you'll be labelled *weak*." Muriel laughed.

"You sound so horribly sensible," she said, "and you leave us no power!"

"Ah! there you're mistaken," said the doctor. "All your strength (and Heaven knows you've got enough!) lies in weakness! When we come to the bottom of it, emotion rules the world, and woman is queen of the emotions."

"Oh, doctor! doctor!" cried Muriel with uplifted hands. "Principles! principles!" Geoff smiled grimly.

"Ah! principles," he said; "they are very good things for theories, and they act as a drug on the passions—but sometimes they don't act! Good-bye, Miss Muriel, my principles warn me of my office hour."

Muriel let him go willingly. She felt absurd, snubbed, dissatisfied. She wanted some one to look at her as Jack had looked, with those adoring, humble eyes, and to listen to her as Jack had listened passionately sympathetic, and ready to agree with her that two blacks make the loveliest white in the world. She hated herself for being so rubbed up the wrong way; and in one breath accused Dr. Grant of being rude, and herself of being ridiculous. Finally she decided that neither of these things had anything to do with it, but that she was upset about Gladys.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"The Devil drove the woman out of Paradise; but not even the Devil could drive Paradise out of the woman."

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

"THE worst of being unusual," said Edith le Mentier to Jack as he talked with her under the cover of loud, unmeaning drawing-room music, "is—that's it's so common. Really you know it's ridiculous running away. Everybody does it!"

"Still you know one can't come back again—one's got to count the cost," he said looking at her anxiously.

She had made him think he cared a good deal for her, and she cared desperately for him. He did not realize how much—it was her greatest victory that he didn't. She trembled at even feeling his eyes on her, his presence near her.

"I feel such a brute," he said, "leaving Gladys."

"Brutes can't live with fools," said Edith le Mentier. "I like—brutes," she added under her breath. Then she looked at him. "I don't see the necessity for you to leave—Gladys," she said.

The music stopped with a crash. The hostess cried, "Oh, how delicious! Thank you! And *which* of the dear old masters was that?" The conversation leaped joyously into freedom.

Jack felt the room and the plants and the beautiful dresses whirl round him like a dream.

"But," he said, "I'm not that sort of a man." He had risen to the very height of his standard. Edith understood instantly.

"I mean," she said gently and sadly, "we might never see each other again."

"Edith! Edith!" he said; "not that, my darling!"

"Remember where you are," she said in an undertone. "They're going to ask me to sing," she added. "Come to me to-morrow."

"I wish you would tell me if you mean to trust me!" he pleaded.

She shrugged her shoulders; they were very pretty ones; then she sang. They had nothing there she knew but Gounod's "There is a green hill far

away." And so she sang that. She sang it beautifully.

Gladys was sitting up for him, she had had a headache and could not accompany him. She always had a headache if there was the chance of her meeting Edith le Mentier. She had dressed very sweetly to welcome him, and looked very young and pathetic. It was so late that he scolded her for sitting up for him, but she told him she had something special to say, and took him into the library, shutting the door. The fire gleamed cheerily, and Jack, as he leaned back in a big arm-chair, and looked at the pretty, eager face opposite him, felt more of a brute than ever.

"I have had Muriel with me all the afternoon," she began nervously, "and she made me promise to talk it all over frankly with you. She's been so good to me, Jack!—and I told her that I would——" She hesitated, and looked at the fire.

He could see that her lips trembled, and a sudden longing to take her in his arms and comfort her came over him, as he had done one short year ago in the Indian garden. But he did not—it was some time since he had done so. And there was this evening's terrible barrier in between.

"Do you know, Jack, we haven't been married quite a year, and yet we aren't very happy, are we? I'm afraid I have been terribly to blame, Jack. I wanted to tell you so long ago, but you didn't—didn't seem to care a bit. Then you began to see such a lot of that horrible woman, and I hated that, and I thought I hated you! People told me I ought to amuse myself, and that there were other men besides neglectful husbands—and Major Kennedy, he's a great friend of yours, and he came so often to the house—and you never seemed to care. Indeed, I don't believe you ever took the trouble to find out, and I was very miserable and silly! I daresay being miserable should have made me wise, but you were the highest thing I loved, and *still* love, Jack, and you didn't care!" She paused a moment, catching her breath, and he grew white in a sudden agony of fear and pain.

He had lived with this woman—she was his wife! He had married her a young, untried girl, and he had given her the key to all the dangers, and left her to face them alone. He dared not interrupt her, and so he waited, fearing each heavy, silent moment as it passed.

"I wanted love, and he—he said he loved me, Jack! Ah! don't speak! I was a fool and worse! but indeed I didn't understand, and then—Muriel came,"—he drew in a deep breath, it might have been a sob of relief,—"and I tried to be different. Do you remember that night, two weeks ago, when you came in late and I kissed you, and you—laughed at me? Oh, Jack, how it hurt me! And then the next day he told me he would sell his soul for a

kiss. Perhaps he didn't mean anything, but you had gone to tea with Edith le Mentier, and I—let him, Jack!" He started forward, but she stopped him by a gesture. "Wait till I finish, please," she said. "Then I understood, and I sent him away, and cried all the afternoon. He wanted me to run away with him, and I was weak and frightened. I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't been for Muriel. You said I wasn't truthful, so I want to be quite truthful now. I think if it hadn't been for Muriel I should have gone. I wanted to hurt your pride if I couldn't win your love; but Muriel stood by me, and wouldn't let me go. She told me what to say to Major Kennedy. I'm not sure—but I believe she said something to him herself—anyway he went off somewhere at once. Oh, Jack, *can't* you love me! can you ever be good to me again?" She lifted up her arms towards him, with the tears rolling down her cheeks. She was weak and irresolute, vain and foolish, but he had done nothing to help her, yet she had gone through what had defeated him, and she was asking him whether he could forgive her! "I loved you, Jack," she cried piteously; "I loved you all the time! And it's all over now for ever and ever!" The color rushed into her face and a new look came into her eyes —a look he did not understand.

"Why do you say it's all over?" he asked dully. "It may happen again."

"It will never come again," she said, "because—oh, Jack, I—I'm afraid, but I'm very glad too—it's always so wonderful, and don't you understand?" she covered her face with her hands, "I am going to be—the mother of your child!" At last it came to him, and for ever killed the irresponsibility of love's selfishness. He took her now in his arms, he dared to do so, because now for him too the other was all over. She was helpless and clinging, she was his wife, and she was going into the valley of the shadow of death because she loved him. "Oh, Jack, will you forgive?"

"Forgive you!" he cried, and tried to explain to her how sorry he was, how much to blame, and how glad at last that they both of them understood, and how now it would all be different—so wonderfully different! But he did not tell her about Edith le Mentier.

When she was safe in bed he wrote to the other woman, and hurt her very bitterly. The other woman, for all her faults, is very often brave, and Edith le Mentier suffered horribly; but she bore the great defeat, and was only a very little irritable the next morning. She did not sing Gounod's song again; she said it was scarcely suitable.

She always shrugged her shoulders and smiled when people mentioned Jack's wife, and when they spoke of him she said "Poor fellow!"

Who could tell that those were the figures of the sum called tragedy? Not the tragedy of the true-hearted who see through pain the vista of glory, but that inordinate agony which because it is so solely selfish eats into the heart that bears it, and for the vista substitutes a *cul-de-sac*.

Jack and Gladys went to his estate in the country, where they spent some bad hours, and learned lessons of tolerance. It was, fortunately for Jack, the hunting season, and he rode hard to hounds. Gladys cultivated the country people, read a great deal, and took an intelligent interest in Jack's "runs." At the end of the time they could live together quite comfortably, and avoided the unendurable with the ready forbearance of quite long married people. The knowing what to avoid is the key to most things, though it is often difficult to turn.

A son was born to them, making Jack a proud father, and consequently a good husband. And Gladys found a life more engrossing than her own. She wrote and asked Muriel to stand godmother.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"Life's business being just the terrible choice."

THERE was trouble at Shindies Alley, not that there was anything unusual in that! For it was a place where trouble was the commonplace, and what the comfortable call tragedy almost a nursery rule. Only the trouble was worse than usual, amounting to the prospect of the police and a possible murder case in the papers. "Rough Tom" being not quite so drunk as usual had beaten his wife nearly to death, a thing he had done before, but never quite so effectually. It was better, the neighbors thought, to send a boy to the doctor's, he and the lady at the club had been there before. This time the doctor arrived first. "Rough Tom" was off, no one of course knew where. All denied any knowledge of him, though exultingly willing to report any unnecessary and loathsome details of the row. The doctor dismissed the crowd curtly. They vanished silently into dark holes and corners.

It was a cold night. The children sharing the den where their mother lay cursing and groaning cried dismally. They also cried loudly; it seemed worth while with both a row and a doctor. Geoff despatched them to a neighbor's across the passage, and examined the woman by a guttering candle. She swore horribly, but she was too much engrossed with pain to be afraid; she was also anxious to explain that it was not her man's fault but another woman's, whom she called by a variety of names. She was too ill to be moved, and the doctor began with steady gentleness to dress the wounds. He needed a nurse, but he had no time to send for one. The case was urgent. We fight as earnestly for the most apparently useless lives as for the dearest, yet we cannot believe that God has as high a respect for the ultimate fate of the crushed soul's life as we have to keep breath in a ruined body.

It was the doctor's profession, but it was that least of all that made him fight for her. He looked up and saw Muriel at the door. He felt intensely angry that she should know such a place existed.

"I should advise you to go away," he said coldly. Muriel looked up for a moment, simply astonished, then she advanced towards him and the heap of rags.

"I am going to help you," she said.

"You are only in the way," he replied grimly, not raising his eyes from the patient. "I want a nurse, not—a young lady." The last words might have been an insult. She flushed angrily.

"I can hold her for you," she said; "I am not afraid." It was necessary to have some help.

"You will faint?" he questioned incredulously.

"No, Dr. Grant, I shall not!" said Muriel. He knew by her tone that she was very angry.

"Well, then, don't waste any more time," was his only reply.

In another moment she was down on her knees, obeying short, imperious orders. Dr. Grant never left much to the initiative of his nurses. The sight was almost more repulsive than she could bear. She wanted to cover her face with her hands instead of using them on the awful crushed form. She wanted to scream at the woman's pain, to rage at the doctor's cruelty, to fly from this whole world of constant reiterated woe; but she was far too angry even to let her hands tremble. At last she felt that her strength was going; she turned white, cold perspiration stood on her forehead. The doctor glanced at her sharply, and then—he laughed. The hot blood rushed to her heart; she grew rigid now, but not with fear; the noise in her ears ceased. She heard every word he said, anticipated every need, and had not reached the limit of her strength when the doctor released her.

"The morphia will keep her quiet till morning," he said. "You'd better go home."

"Will she live?" she asked him.

"Unfortunately—yes," said Geoff. "Women of that sort generally do—to be beaten again!" They went in silence to the door. Muriel was quite certain now that she disliked him.

Geoff left a few parting directions to a reluctant, but almost entirely sober, neighbor. When they were in the street Muriel waited for him to explain; but he did not explain. It was a habit of his not to, possibly owing to his professional desire to steer clear of the definite. Muriel was too astonished, hurt and indignant to remain silent for long. She stopped.

"Good-night, Dr. Grant," she said with an icy formality. The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"What's the matter?" he asked. She looked at him with a searching angry glance.

"Your manner has not pleased me to-night," she replied quietly; "I should prefer to return alone."

"I am sorry if I have displeased you, Miss Dallerton," said Geoff with his mouth ominously twitching. Was it imaginable that she couldn't see he wanted to kiss her? As she stood there, aggrieved, defiant, serious, her eyes like two points of light under her heavy hair, the bright color in her cheeks, the whole daring absurdity of *her* seriously facing life there in a horrible alley instead of the delicate luxury of a West-End drawing-room, he could have laughed at the inappropriateness of it. "It's too cold for an apology," he ventured more gravely. "I will see you about this later, if I may. Please let me see you home first."

She did not want to seem girlishly tempestuous, so she assented to his last request, but in bitter silence walked with him to the club. She did not give him her hand as he said "Good-night." She wanted tremendously to refuse to allow him to call, to cut short their acquaintance, to never set eyes on him again. But she felt an absurd desire to cry brought on by the physical strain of the past two hours, so that she said nothing.

Yet when she was in her room she would not cry. She forced the tears back, and remembered how he had laughed at her! The utter careless brutality of his whole behavior! And Cynthia could be so foolish as to imagine he cared for her! She herself had never for an instant dreamed it—she refused to admit it—it was impossible! It never occurred to her in the least that Geoff had been trying to rouse her courage through opposition, and to control his own too tender feelings by a mask of rudeness. Even if it had occurred to her she would probably have been just as angry, for what she was really indignant with was his strength and her weakness, and she could find no excuses for that.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"The best
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest."

THE studio lamps made cheerful colors in the right places, and Cynthia feeling the world as far as she was concerned in her lap, in the shape of a baby boy, round and fair with undecided features, felt that life had brought its own rewards, richly, wonderfully. She was almost afraid, she was so happy, with the fear of those who have gone into the darkness, and dreamt only of the light. Leslie Damores was painting her again, but the face was different. It was called "Motherhood," and it told of the great need satisfied. Muriel was coming in to see the picture. The studio door opened and a woman come into the room; she was little, and French, and beautifully dressed. She advanced towards Cynthia with a little cry; then she laughed.

"Why, Cynthia, you've got a baby! I told them to let me come right up. I was an old friend, and I just had to come. Oh, there's your husband!" She turned with another rapid laugh towards Leslie. He was looking bravely at his wife, whose face was strained and anxious; the woman seemed evidently nervous too.

"Well, you're very silent you two," she cried defiantly.

"What do you want?" said Cynthia coldly. "I thought you had gone away."

"And so I did, and I've come back. Clifton died, and I married again. Did you know it?—an American too—and he didn't give me any peace till I promised to get Launcelot. We Americans seem to have such horrid consciences."

"You never had, had you?" said Cynthia quietly. The woman looked angry, then she laughed.

"Well, I guess you're about right—I never had much trouble that way; but when Sam Hicks wanted Launcelot I felt it would be right sweet to take him back with us to America, and I had the greatest time finding your address. You're fixed up real genteel, Mr. Damores; I should think you must have made painting pay. And is that Cynthia's picture? How perfectly lovely!"

"Mrs. Hicks," said Cynthia slowly—"I think I understood you to say that was your husband's name—when you let me take Launcelot three years ago I had no idea you would ever claim him again. He has just gone to school here in England. He is very happy——" Cynthia's voice broke. "Oh, why do you want him again?" she cried—"it's cruel."

"I am going to have my boy," said Mrs. Hicks raising her voice. "I tell you——"

"A moment," Leslie Damores broke in. "You were last heard of running away with a French Count. Do you think you are a fit person to take care of a child?"

"Why, how dare you?" she cried, facing him with frightened rage; "I declare I never heard the like! I'll have you up for libel, Mr. Leslie Damores; and, as for you, Mrs. Leslie Damores——"

"I am speaking for my wife, and you may speak to me," said Leslie, "otherwise you leave the room." Mrs. Hicks began to cry.

"And to think that I am respectably married and everything. But that's what it is, a poor woman must always suffer for her mistakes, while as for you—you can have as many of them as you like, and you're none the worse for them!" She stopped again; their silence checked her, she felt hushed by their quiet contempt; and yet, angrier than ever, "I'm the boy's mother," she said turning to Cynthia; "how would you like to have your child taken from you?" Cynthia looked helplessly at her husband; the woman had touched the right plea; she was the boy's mother.

"You shall see Launcelot to-morrow, Mrs. Hicks," said Leslie, "and by that time I shall have inquired into your case, and if your assertions are true as to your husband and his means of support we will consider the matter. Meanwhile there is nothing more to be said, and if you will allow me I will take you downstairs."

Mrs. Hicks looked spitefully at Cynthia, but Leslie's face checked her—the baby had begun to cry. She flung up her head and left the room. The baby had gone, and Cynthia was crying alone in the studio when he came back. He took her in his arms.

"Oh, Leslie," she moaned, "he meant everything to us, dear little fellow. Do you remember he made me good again, and he found you for me? Leslie, I can't let him go back to her. She left him so cruelly. He is mine, darling—tell me I needn't let him go—he's such a delicate little fellow. Oh, I can't! I can't!" He stroked her hair; she had never cried since her marriage.

"Dearest, we will leave it to him. She is his mother—we mustn't forget that. She has some claim on him, after all."

"You could threaten to tell her husband about—about the Count," she whispered.

"Oh, no, no, no," said Leslie gently.

"I didn't mean it, dear—I didn't mean it," she sobbed afresh.

"I will go and bring Launcelot," he said.

"Isn't that baby crying?" It was not baby crying, but she turned and fled upstairs.

"After all," said Leslie thoughtfully, "she's not Launcelot's mother." Then he went out.

Muriel came in to find the studio empty of everything but the great picture of "Motherhood." The woman holding Paradise in her arms stung her to the quick with her expression of ineffable content. She was not looking at the child in her arms. She was holding it too close to need the reassurance of a glance; she was looking across the child with all the loves in her eyes, steady and beautiful and bright, eyes too happy to smile. Muriel knew suddenly that it was the way Cynthia looked at her husband. She did not wish to see them then, so slowly she let the curtain down before the picture and crept softly out of the room. But the woman's eyes followed her home, and when she was in the club and back in her room she saw them still. They seemed to have a quiet wonder in them that any woman could ever dream that there was any other happiness than that.

"Something is surely wrong when one begins to count up one's blessings," said Muriel. "My life is full—full of everything I want!" But as she looked defiantly in the glass she saw she had not got the woman's look in her eyes.

Launcelot and Leslie walked hand in hand very solemnly home through the streets of London. Leslie had been trying to explain. Launcelot's little face was very white, but he would not cry.

"Do you think—do you think I ought to leave you and Lady Beautiful and—and baby?" he asked wistfully.

"She is your mother, dear boy, and she wants you very much," said Leslie reproaching himself for the coldness in his voice.

"And are mothers everything?"

"Mothers are a very great deal, old fellow. You see you belong to them—you're their very own."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the little fellow wearily. "Baby is Lady Beautiful's very own, and so are you, but I'm not to be any more." There was a quiver in his voice. Leslie pressed his little hand, he felt too much to

speak. “My mother didn’t want me very much for her very own before, did she? You see she gave me to Lady Beautiful.”

“She wants you now,” said Damores hoarsely. They were very near home.

“I—I don’t think I want her very much, you know,” said Launcelot wistfully. “But they didn’t give me any choice, did they, when they made me belong to her?”

“I think they thought she needed you; you see she has no one else but a new husband,” Leslie explained.

“Then I must go,” said Launcelot as Leslie opened the door, “because you see a new husband can’t be much, and a boy who belongs to you must mean more, I should think.”

“I am quite sure that a boy who belongs to you means much more,” said Leslie kissing him.

So it was all settled before Launcelot ever saw Lady Beautiful. They looked a little nervously at each other as the door opened and they saw her sitting by the fire. She sprang up with a little sudden cry and her arms held out to him. He had been to school and knew that fellows never cry, but he had only just learnt it—and he forgot. Leslie watched them for a moment sobbing in each other’s arms. The tenderness and pity from her new rich store made her seem more wonderful than ever to him. His heart ached at their grief, but the woman’s assertions were true—the child must go. The inevitable had to him a consolation. He went and smoked hard in the studio. To Cynthia it was a cage, and she struggled in vain against the bars, crying over Launcelot as he slept at last, with troubled breathing from his late sobs. But when the baby cried she went to it again. The next morning Mrs. Hicks appeared. She was nervously anxious to please. She called Launcelot by all the affectionate names she could think of, but he only looked at her with half-frightened, wondering eyes.

“And now Launcelot will come with mother?” she asked at last. He looked wistfully back at Cynthia and her husband, his heart breaking. Parting with the baby had been gone through upstairs. He had cried till he could cry no more, so he only looked at them.

“I would rather belong to you, Lady Beautiful,” he whispered, as she put her arms about him, “much, much rather belong to you.”

She watched him walk with his mother down the street, her face pressed to the panes. When he reached the corner he turned and waved back to her. His mother gave his arm a little pull, and he did not turn again. It was the last time Cynthia ever saw him. He went out of her life as suddenly and

strangely as he had entered it; but in the meantime the broken thread had been joined together again, the dreams she had resolutely crushed had blossomed in a garden of reality, and the great power of love had filled up what had been the emptiness and desolation of her soul.

CHAPTER XL

"How Love is the only good in the world."

"Now I have come to make my apologies, Miss Dallerton," said the doctor in a cheery voice.

It was a cold day, and he looked aggressively warm and reassuring. He never needed to be made allowances for, and Muriel could never quite forgive him that. She had made so many allowances for Jack.

"I'm afraid you thought me a little short with you the other day—in fact, you were so displeased you had half a mind to walk through Stepney by yourself—now, hadn't you?" he asked smiling.

"You were very rude to me the other day, Dr. Grant, and though you seem to take my forgiveness for granted, you have not yet given me any explanation." The doctor laughed, but his eyes grew colder.

"Well!" he said, "so you won't forgive me without?" Muriel frowned.

"If you have a reason I should like to hear it," she suggested.

The doctor walked once or twice up and down the room. She watched him unwillingly; he had the most splendid shoulders; she did not think he could be more than thirty-six. Then he stopped before her chair and looked at her very gravely. He was so tall that she felt at a disadvantage; some instinct made her rise too, and they stood there face to face, their eyes doing battle. She looked away at last.

"Well?" she questioned. She was conscious that her breath was coming quickly, and she thanked Heaven she didn't blush easily.

"I was short to you," said the doctor deliberately, "because it seemed to me the only way of getting help from you. If I hadn't made you thoroughly angry you would probably have fainted."

"I should not have fainted," she said, her eyes flashing fiercely. She knew she was not speaking the truth, but it was too desperately difficult. If she submitted in one thing, where would they stop? She was beginning to lose her self-control and her sense of proportion at the same time. It is dangerous for a man to lose both, but it is fatal to a woman to lose either.

"There was another reason," said the doctor slowly. Muriel was silent. "Do you want to hear it?"

"If——" she began icily. "Yes, I may as well hear it," she finished in confusion. She did not want him to think she cared enough to be angry.

"I love you!" he said with the same quiet deliberation and a pause between each word, "and it was a little difficult to let you help in any other way."

The room grew suddenly tense; each breath was a terrible sword which shook the universe; there seemed an awful conspiracy in the room to win some concession; the very chairs and table seemed to wait and listen. A hand-organ in the street clanged them back into facts again. The doctor, still looking at her, picked up a paper-knife; Muriel sank back into the chair. There seemed nothing left in the world to say, but she felt as if there might be if he would only keep still a moment.

"I am very sorry," she said at last, and then she could have bitten her tongue out, it sounded so commonplace. She noticed that he was looking suddenly very tired, but he smiled with grave eyes.

"I knew you would be," he said, "and I must go and make some calls. But you do understand now, don't you?"

"I suppose I do," said Muriel; "but are you going away?" He almost laughed at her thoughtlessness.

"Well! yes, Miss Dallerton," he said; "I think I must go now."

Muriel rose to her feet, and a great wave of desolation swept over her. She stood there alone, and before her eyes passed the vision of those who had left her—Alec—Jack—Cynthia—her uncle. All with their different lives, their different circles. And now he was going, the friend who had made life and her work, her youth and her beauty so excellently well worth while—with whom she had argued, quarrelled and discussed—and he was leaving her. All of a sudden she knew she could not bear it—that she, too, needed help and comfort and sympathy—that though one may give all and prosper, yet it is blessed to receive as well. And then he looked so tired. He was waiting for her to dismiss him, and he could not understand why she was keeping him.

"I don't want you to go," said Muriel at last. "I'm sure I need you more—more than the other patients, only you must learn to ask questions and not to make assertions only if you want me to be a satisfactory case!"

"What made you say that you were sorry?" he asked her after a long, wonderful pause.

"I was sorry," she laughed at him, "that you didn't tell me so before!"

When Jack heard of her marriage he shrugged his shoulders. “I always thought she would run *amôk* on some sort of a professional chap, but I rather thought it would be a parson,” he said, and thought how much better she might have done for herself if she had only known when she had a good thing.

“I thought she was cut out for an old maid,” Edith le Mentier told her friends; “but those sort of women generally marry and have fourteen children.”

It mattered very little to Muriel what was said. She looked at things now with the eyes of the woman in Damores’ picture; and she and Geoff having found so much for themselves were the more anxious to give their sunshine to the world. They believed that the purposes of love, in human and material things, were the channels through which the spirit finds soaring room—never apart from earth, but ever nearer heaven.

Their one need left was to join the gospel of example, which is simply loving everything for love’s sake, whether it visibly love back or no. To acquaintances they seemed to have positively left the world, but they themselves knew that they had found the true one.

Transcriber’s Notes:

A few obvious punctuation and typesetting errors have been corrected without note. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

[The end of *Life, the Interpreter* by Phyllis Bottome]