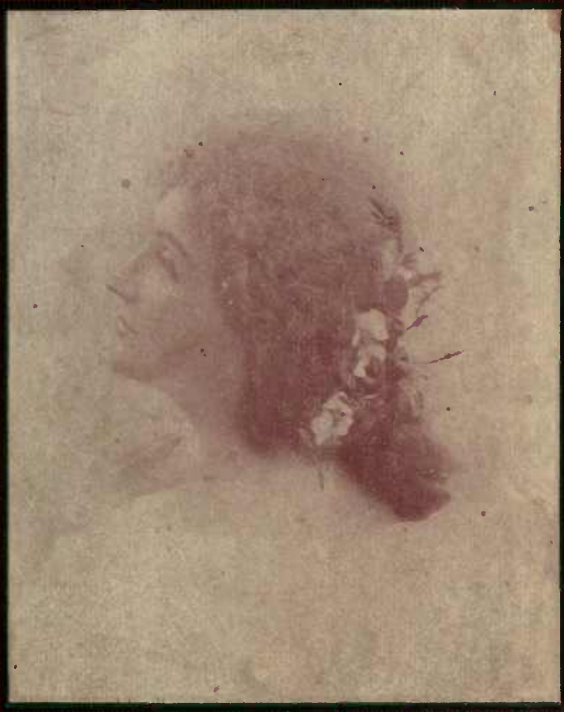
A FURNACE OF EARTH



By

HALLIE·ERMINIE·RIVES

John Witchus
Houston
Texas

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A FURNACE OF EARTH

By the Same Author.

THE SINGING WIRE.

A FOOL IN SPOTS.

SMOKING FLAX.

AS THE HART PANTETH.

A FURNACE OF EARTH

BY

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

Author of "Smoking Flax," etc.

As silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

—DAVID.

NEW YORK

THE CAMELOT COMPANY

1900

TO
R. W.

Their first estate of joy they leave,
So pure, impassioned and elate,
And learn from Piety to grieve
Because their hearts are passionate.

—The Revelation of St. Love the Divine.

THE ELEMENTS.

EARTH, AIR AND WATER.

ALONG the wavering path which followed the twisting summit of the cliffs toiled a little figure. His face was tanned, and from under a brown tangle of hair looked eyes blue and fearless.

He had walked a mile, and home lay a mile further, where white-painted cottages glowed against the close green velvet of the hills. The way ran staggeringly, and the boy was tired.

A group of ragged children tossed up their caps and shouted from the cluster of fishermen's huts set further back from the sea; he did not heed them, but seated himself on the tufted panic-grass and turned his eyes seaward. The hot sun slanted silver-bright flashes from the moody

water, and whistling swallows, beyond the cliff-edge, soared and dropped against the blue of the sky, like black balls from a juggler's hands. A light breeze, lifting, ruffled with a million ripples the gray surge, played along the path in scurrying dust-whorls and cooled his hot cheeks.

On its heels came stealthily a yellowish dimness; a sullen bank of cloud crept swiftly along the northern horizon. From a thin, black line, it grew to a pall, rising ominous and threatening. Quick flashes pricked its jagged edge. Beneath it the sea turned to a weight of liquid lead.

The boy Richard rose fascinated, his eyes upon the advancing squall, his ears open to the rising breathing of the waves, troubled by under-dreams. His lips were parted eagerly, and his browned hands clutched at the brim of his hat. Often and often, from his window, he had seen the power of the storm; now its near and intimate presence throbbed through him.

The foremost gust struck him with sudden fury, turning him about as though with strong

hands upon his shoulders, and tearing his hat from his grasp. He caught his breath with a sense of outraged dignity; then, bending his head resolutely to the onslaught, he stumbled forward. The air was full of scudding mist-streaks, and twisted roots caught at his feet in the half-darkness. The fierce wind tore with its claws at the little jacket, buttoned bravely, and tossed the damp, rebellious hair. The fishermen's huts lay just behind him, a dry and beckoning shelter; before him, for a few paces, stretched the path leading into ghostly obscurity. The boy bent low, bracing his legs doggedly against the stubble, and foot by foot went on along that lone mile into the storm.

On a sudden the blurred sea-view was swallowed up. The wind swooped, grasping at his ankles. It picked up pebbles and flung them, howling, against his body. They stung like heavy hail. It snapped off unwilling twigs from the cringing bushes and dashed them into the childish face. But he did not retreat. What was the

wind that it should force him back! A mighty determination was in his little soul. His teeth were tight clenched, and his legs ached with the strain. The blast caught away his breath and he turned his back to it. At the moment it seemed to lull, tempting him to go its way, but he would not yield.

Then the tempest gathered all its forces and hurled them spitefully, hatefully against him, barring, lashing him cruelly, thrusting him backward. He dropped upon his knees in the path, giving not an inch. The wind, sopped with heavy rain, fell upon him bodily. He stretched himself flat, winding his fingers among the roots of the wiry grasses, struck down, bruised, but still unconquered.

A lone, pied gull, careening sidelong through the wind-rifts, roused in him a helpless frenzy of anger and resentment. He clenched his tiny fist and shook it at the sky, choking, gasping, sobbing, great tears of impotent rage and mortification blown across his cheeks.

FIRE.

THE red-gold of the sun still warmed the late summer dusk. The fading light sifted between the curtains of the window and touched lovingly the checkered coverlid, moulding into soft outline the rounded little limbs beneath. The long hair spread goldenly across the pillow, and the wide brown eyes were open.

Old Anne was going to die—old Anne with the ugly wrinkled face and bony fingers from which all the children ran. She was going to die that night. Margaret had heard it whispered among the servants. That very same night while she herself was asleep in bed! Her soul was going to leave her body and fly up to God.

She wondered how it would look, but she knew it would be very beautiful. Its back would not be bent, nor its face drawn with shining burn-

scars. It would be young and straight, and it would have wings—long, white wings, such as the angels had in the big stained-glass window over the choir-box in the chapel. It would have a ring of light around its head, such as the moon had on misty evenings. It would go just at the moment when old Anne died, and those who watched close enough might see. Would it speak? Or would it go so swiftly that it could only smile for a good-by? She wondered if its eyes would be kindly and blue, not dim and watery as Anne's had been. Her own face was smoother and prettier than Anne's, but her eyes were dark. Angels always had blue eyes. Its face would be turned up toward heaven, where it was going, and its wings would make a soft, whispering sound, like a pigeon's when it starts to fly. One would have to be very quick, but if one were there at just the right minute, one could see it.

Oh, if *she* only could! She felt quite sure she would not be afraid of Anne then, knowing that

she was just going to be an angel! If they would only let her! She was so little, and they would be watching, so that maybe they would not notice her. Perhaps she could slip in quietly on tiptoe, and then she would see a real shining soul, such as she herself had inside of her, and which she loved to imagine sometimes looked out of her eyes at her from the looking-glass. A breathless eagerness seized her, and she sat up in the bed, hugging her knees and resting her chin upon them.

She listened a moment; the house was very still. Then she threw down the covers, and jumped in her bare feet to the floor. She sat down on the rug in her white nightgown, and pulled on her stockings with nervous haste, and her shoes, leaving them unbuttoned and flapping. Then she slipped into her muslin dress, fastening it behind at the neck and waist, and opened the door, tugging at the big brass knob, and quaking at its complaining creaks. No one was in sight, and the little figure, with its bright floating hair

and rosy skin showing between its shoulders like a belated locust, stole fearfully down the dim stairway, along the deserted hall, and sidling through the half-opened door, stepped out among the long-fingered glooms of the standing shrubbery.

She hesitated a moment, frightened at the outdoor dark, and then, catching her breath, ran quickly around the corner of the house, and down the drive toward the low, clapboarded structure beside the stables, where a lighted window-shade with moving shadows pointed out the room of that solemn presence.

The night air was warm and heavy, and its door stood wide. She crept up close and listened. Between low-muttered words of subdued conversation, she heard a slow and labored breathing—a breathing now stopping, now beginning again, and with a curious rattle in it which somehow awed her. From where she crouched, she could see only the foot of the bed, with its tall,

bare posts. There seemed to be expectancy in the hushed voices within, and a quick fear seized her lest she should miss the wonderful sight. Quivering with eagerness, she rose to her feet, and with her fascinated gaze seeking out the old face on the pillow, stepped straight forward into the room.

She heard a rising murmur of astonishment, of protest, and before her light-blinded eyes had found their way, felt herself seized roughly, unceremoniously, lifted bodily off her feet and borne out into the night. She heard, through the passionate resentment of her childish mind, the soothing endearments of Jem the gardener, and she struggled to loose herself, beating at his face with her hands and sobbing with helpless suffocation of anger.

A frightened maid met them at the door and took her from him, carrying her to her room to undress her and sit by her till she should fall asleep. No assurance that old Anne would soon

be happy in heaven comforted her. No one understood, and she was too hurt to explain what she had wanted.

So she lay through the long hours, the bitter tears of grief and disappointment wetting her pillow.

I.

The air above the shelving stretches of sand-beach shimmered and dilated with the heat of the August afternoon, as Margaret walked just beyond the yeasty edge of the receding waves. There was little wind stirring, and the cool damp was pleasant under her feet. She had left the hotel behind, and the straggling line of bobbing, dark-blue specks, which indicated the habitual bathers, was small in the distance.

A blue-and-silver bound book was in her hand, and her gray tweed skirt and soft jacket, with a bunch of drooping crimson roses at the waist, made a grateful spot upon the white glare. Summer sun and sea-wind had given a clear olive to her face and a scarlet radiance to her full lips, softly curved. Her hair, in waving masses of

flush-brown, flowed out from beneath her straw hat, tempting a breeze.

To her left were tumbled monotonous, low dunes, and beyond them the torn clayey bank, gashed by storms; to her right, only barren stretch of sea and sweep of sky.

At a bight of the shore, under the long, curved bole of a pine, leaning to its fall from the high bank through which half its naked roots struck sprangling, ran a zigzag footpath to a little grove, where hemlock and stunted oak grew thickly. Up she climbed, poising lightly, and drawing herself to the last step by grasping a sprawling creeper. The green coolness refreshed her, and there was more movement in the higher air.

She followed the twists of the path among the low bushes clustering in front of a sparse clearing. Facing her, in the edge of the shade, where the light fell in mottled shadows upon a soft, springy floor of dead pine needles, with its wide arms laced in the rasping boughs of the scrub-

oaks around it, stood an unwieldy wooden cross, hewed roughly, its base socketed in stone and its horizontal bar held in place by a rust-red bolt. A cracked and crazy bench, also hewn, was set beneath, and just above this was nailed a heavy board in which was deeply cut this half-effaced inscription:

Here Lies
The Body of an Unknown Woman
Drowned
In the Wreck of the Schooner Bartlett,
May 9, 1871.

and below it, in larger characters, now almost obliterated by gray-and-yellow stains:

Ora Pro Anima Sua.

This was Margaret's favorite spot. She preferred its melancholy solitude to the vivacious companionship of the cottage piazza, and its quiet tones to the bizarre hues of the beach pa-

vilion. It lay removed from the usual paths, reached only by a wide detour, across bush-tangled wastes or the long, uncomfortable walk up-shore on the hot, yielding sand. Now she sank upon the seat with a deep sigh of pleasure, letting her book fall open in her lap. Her eyes roved far off across the gray-green heave where a buccaneering fish-hawk slanted craftily.

A deeper light was in them as they fell upon the open printed leaf:

> "For Love is fine and tense as silver wire,
> Fierce as white lightning, glorious as drums
> And beautiful as snow-mountains. Swift she is
> As leaping flame and calm as winter stars."

Its chaste beauty had long ago stamped the passage upon her memory; to-day the lines hymned themselves to a subtle, splendid music.

Tossing the volume suddenly to one side, her hands loosed her belt. She held the limp band movelessly a moment, and then bent her face eagerly over it. Under her fingers the filigree of the clasp slid back, disclosing a portrait. It was

that of a man, young, resolute-faced, with brown, wavy hair parted in the middle, and candid forehead. It was rugged and masterful, but with a sweetness of lips and a tender, gray softness of proud eyes that bespoke him not more a doer than a dreamer.

As she looked, her lips parted and a faint color crept up her neck, showing brightly against the auburn hollows of her hair. She fondled and petted the ivory with her hands, and then raised it to her lips, kissing it, murmuring to it, and folding it over and over in the warm moistness of her breath.

Holding it against her face, she walked up and down the open space with quick, pushing steps, her free hand stripping the leaves from the sweeping bush fronds, her hat fallen back, swaying from the knotted streamers caught under the slipping coil between her shoulders. Stopping at length in front of the bench, she hung the belt upon a corner of the carven board, its violet weave tinging the weathered grain and the

painted circlet glowing like a jewelled period for the massive lettering.

With one knee on the warped seat, she read again the fading sentences.

"An unknown woman." Gone down into the cold green depths! Perhaps with a dear, glowing secret in her heart, a one name bubbling from her lips, a new quivering something in her soul, which the waters could not still! That body buffeted and tossed by rearing breakers, to lie nameless in a neglected grave; that soul, its earthly longing forgotten, to go forever unregretful of what it had cried for with all the might of its human passion!

Ah! but *did it?* If death touched her own soul to-day! "For love is strong as death. * * * Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it!" In imagination she felt the numbing clasp of the dragging under-deeps; she saw her soul wandering, wraith-like, through shadowless, silent spaces and across infinite distances. Would it bear with it a placid joy?

Would it know no quicker heart-beat, no tears that reddened the eyelid, no tender thrill in all its lucent veins? Would nothing, nothing of that strange, sweet wildness that ran imprisoned in all her blood cling to it still?

The thought bit her. She reached up and snatched down the belt, pressing the clasp tightly with her cheek in the curve of her shoulder, repeating dumbly to herself the pious "Ora pro anima sua" that stood before her eyes.

A far crackling struck across her mood, and hastily drawing the belt about her waist, she leaned sideways from the upright beam, raising her hand quickly, as if to put back the lawless meshes of her hair. She heard the sound of a confident step, crunching on the marly sand, and the swish of bent-back bushes. It was coming in a direct line toward her. There was a dry clatter of falling fence-rails, as though the intruder, disdaining obstacles, preferred to walk through them.

She caught a glimpse of a familiar, bright-colored scarf between the glimmering, leafy tangles, and then the thrust of a quick spring, and an instant later the figure that had vaulted the heavy fence came dropping, feet foremost, through the snapping screen of brambles, and walked straight toward the spot where she had risen to her feet with a little glad cry.

II.

"Give me your hand," he said peremptorily. They were on a pebbly spur of the descending path, and Daunt had leaped down below her. As she stretched it out to him, he drew it sharply toward him. She felt herself grasped firmly in his arms, swung off and lifted to the smooth level beneath. She could feel his uneven breaths stirring in the roots of her hair, and his wrists straining. Her head fell against his shoulder and her look met his, startled. His sunburned face was pale, and his gray eyes were hazed with a daring softness.

Then, as she lay passive in his arms, a fiery longing grew swiftly in them, and he suddenly bent his head and kissed her—again and again. She felt her unused mouth moulding to answer-

ing kisses beneath his own, and her cheeks rushing into a flame. Through her closed lids the sun hung like a rosy mist of woven sparkles.

"I love you!—*you!—you!*" he said, stammering and hoarsely. "I *love* you!"

The tumbling passion of the utterance pierced through her like a spear of desperate gladness. Every nerve reached and quivered, tendril-like. His deep breathing, toned with the dripping lap of the shingle seemed to throb through her. She lay quiet, breathless, her lashes drooped, her very skin tense under the lasting burn of his lips.

"Margaret! Ardee, dear! Look at me!"

Her eyes flowed into his. From a blur under cloud-pale eyelids, they had turned to violet balls, shot through with a trembling light. The look she gave him melted over him in a rage of love. Desire bordered it, a smile dipped in it, promise made it golden, and he saw his own longing painted in it as a pilgrim sees his reflection in a slumbering pool.

She clasped her hands on his head, pushing

back his cloth cap, and framing his face in the long, sweeping oval of her arms. He could feel little vibrant thrills in her fingers. He held her tightly, masterfully, first at arm's length, laughing into her wide eyes, and then close, folding her, pressing her hair with his hands.

The leaves from the roses she wore fell in splotches of deep red, sprinkling the brown-veined sand at their feet; the dense, bruised odor, mixed with the salty breath of seaweed, seemed to fill and choke all her swaying senses.

"It is like a storm!" she said. "I have dreamed of it coming at the last gently, like a bright morning, but it isn't like that! It seemed as if that were the way it would come to me—like a still, small voice—but it isn't! It's the wind and the earthquake and the fire! Oh!" she said, drawing her breath in a long, shuddering inhalation. "Do you smell that rose-scent? Did ever any roses smell like that? They—they make me dizzy! Feel me tremble."

Every pulsation of her frame ran through him

with a swift, delicious sensation, like the touching of rough velvet. Her curling hair, where it sprang against his neck, ridged his skin with a creeping delight.

"Do you know," he said, "you are like a great, tall, yellow lily. Some gnome has drawn amber streaks in your hair—it shines like a gold-stone —and rubbed your cheeks with a pink tulip leaf! And your lips are like—no, they are like nothing but ripe strawberries! Nobody could ever describe your eyes; they are most like a bed of purple violets set in a brown cloud with the sun shining through it. Tell me!" he said suddenly. "Do you love me? Do you? Do you?"

"Yes! yes! yes! Oh," she breathed, "what is there in your hands? I want them to touch me!"

He passed his palms lightly along the bow-like curve of her cheek.

"It is like fire and flowers and music," she said, "all rolled into one. And those roses! They are attar. The sand looks as if it were bleeding!"

"Shall you think of me when I am on the train to-night?"

"All the time—every minute!"

"And to-morrow, while I am in the city?"

"Yes!"

"And Monday?"

"Then you will come back to me!"

He strained her to him in the white sunlight, and kissed her again, on the lips and forehead and hands, and she clung to him, lifting her face to him eagerly and passionately.

Margaret stood watching the firm-knit figure as it crossed the sand space. She saw the lift of his lithe shoulders as he pulled himself up the bank, saw his form splashed against the sky, saw the flutter of his handkerchief as he flung her a last signal.

She waved her hand in return, and he disappeared.

Then she ran to a slant spile rising lonely from the sand, and sank down quivering. It seemed to

her as if she could bear no more joy; her body ached with it. She threw up her hands and laughed aloud in sheer ecstasy.

Then she remembered that she had left her book in the grove, and she stumbled up and walked back slowly, smiling and humming an air as she went along.

The first shade of the dimming afternoon lay under the trees as she climbed again to the little clearing, and the sunbeams glanced obliquely from the crooked oak branches. The air was very still and freighted only with the soft swish of the ebb-tide and the clean fragrance of balsam. Her book lay open and face down on the plank seat. She picked it up and sat down, leaning back.

She was still humming, low-voiced, and as she sat she began to sing—not strongly, but hushed, as though for a drowsy ear—with her face lifted and her dreamy eyes upon the sea margin.

"Purple flower and soaring lark,
Throbbing song and story bold,

All must pass into the dark,
Die and mingle with the mold.
Ah, but still your face I see!
Bend and clasp me; Sweet, kiss me!"

It was Daunt's song, the one he most loved to hear her sing. But to-day it had a new, rich meaning. She stretched her hands on either side, grasping the seat, and sang on to the bending boughs, rubbing slowly against the weather-stained beam arms above her head:

"Dear, to-day shall never rust!
What are we to be o'erwise?
All that doth not smell of dust
Lieth in your lips and eyes.
So, while loving yet may be,
Bend and fold me; Sweet, kiss me!"

The shade grew darker as she sat. It deepened the brown of her eyes and the sea-bloom in her cheeks, and the loitering lilac of the west touched the coils of her hair, as they lay against the gray board, blotting with their living bronze the half-effaced, forgotten inscription:

Pray for Her Soul.

III.

In the pause before the service began, Margaret's eyes drifted aimlessly about the dim body of the small but pretentious seaside chapel. It held the same incongruous gathering so often to be seen at coast resorts, a mingling of ultra-fashionable summer visitors, and homely and uncomfortably well-dressed village folk. There was Mrs. Atherton, whose bounty had elevated the parish from a threadbare existence, with simple service and plain altar furniture, to a devout adherence to High Church methods, with candles and rich vestments, and a never-failing welcome for stylish visiting clergymen from the city; there was the wife of the proprietor of the Beach Hotel, whose costumes were always faithful second editions of Mrs. Atherton's; there were the

rector's two daughters and the usual sprinkling of familiar faces that she had passed on the drive or the beach walk.

The lawn outside was shimmering with the heat that had followed an over-night shower, and the pewed calm oppressed her. Her limbs were nettled with teasing pricks of restlessness.

The open windows let in a heavy, drenched rose-odor, tinged with a distant salt smell of sea. The air was weighted with it—it was the same mingled odor that had filled her nostrils when she stood with Daunt on the shore, with the wet wind in their faces and fluttering petals of the crushed roses she had worn staining the dun sand and crisp, strown seaweed like great drops of blood. It overpowered her senses. She breathed it deeply, feeling a delicious intoxication, and its suggested memory ran through her veins like an ethereal ichor, tingling to her finger ends.

Her eyes, heavy and swimming, were full of the iridescent colors of the stained-glass window

opposite, with the dull yellow aureole about the head of the central figure. The hues wove and blended in a background of subdued harmony, lending life and seeming movement to the features.

"A man somewhat tall and comely, his hair the color of a ripe chestnut, curling and waving." The description recurred to her, not as though written to the Roman Senate by Lentulus, Governor of Judea, but as if printed in bossed letters about the rim of the picture. "In the middle of his head a seam parteth it, after the manner of the Nazarites. His forehead is plain and very delicate, his face without spot or wrinkle, beautified with a lovely red; his nose and moutl of charming symmetry. His look is very innocent and mature; his eyes gray, clear and quick. His body is straight and well proportioned, his hands and arms most delectable to behold."

"His eyes gray, clear and quick." From the window they followed her—the eyes that had looked into hers on the beach, full of longing

light—the eyes that had charmed her and had seemed to draw up her soul to look back at them.

She dragged her gaze away with a quick shudder, to a realization of her surroundings. A paining recoil seized her at the temerity of her thought, and her imaginings shrank within themselves. A vivid shame bathed her soul. She felt half stifled.

The dulled and droning intonation of the reader came to her as something banal and shop-worn. He was large and heavy-voiced. His hair was sandy and thin, and his skin was of that peculiar pallor and pursiness bred of lack of exercise and a full diet. It reminded her irresistibly of pink plush. He had a double chin, and he intoned with eyes cast down, and his large hands clasped before him, after the fashion affected by the higher church. His monotonous and nasal utterance glossed the periods with unctuous and educated mispronunciation. The congregation was punctuated with nodding heads.

To Margaret, listening dully, there seemed to be an inexpressible incongruity between the man and the office, between the face and the robes, which should have lent a spirituality. She looked about her furtively. Surely, surely she must see that thought reflected from other faces; but her range of vision took in only countenances overflowing with conscious Sabbath rectitude, heads nodding with rhythmic sleepiness and eyes shining with churchly complacency. Suddenly through the rolling periods the meaning struck through to Margaret, and her wandering mind was instantly arrested.

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are of the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

She heard the words with painful eagerness. Her mind seemed suddenly as acute, as quick to

record impressions as though she had just awakened from a long sleep.

A woman in a pew to Margaret's right dropped her prayer-book with a smart crash onto the wooden floor. The smooth brows drew together sharply and his voice, pauseless, took on a note of asperity, of irritated displeasure. Reading was a specialty of his, and to be interrupted spoiled the general effect and displeased him.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

An old man, bent and deaf, sat close up under the reader's desk. He leaned forward with elbow on knee and one open palm behind a hairy ear. His eyes were raised, and his look was rapt. Margaret could see his side-face from where she sat. He saw only the sanctified figure of the

priest and heard no human monotone, but the voice of God, speaking through the lips of His anointed. He was a real worshipper. For her the spiritual was swallowed up. That one bodily image stood before her inner self. It had blotted out her diviner view; it had even thrust itself behind the flowing robes and sandaled feet and had dared to usurp the place of the eternal symbol of human spirituality!

She locked her hands about her prayer-book, pinching them between her knees. The woman directly in front of her wore a hot, figured silk and a drab mull boa that looked dreadfully like bunched caterpillars. The riotous rose-odor made her faint and sick, and she had a horrible feeling that the carved heads of the jutting stone work were laughing evilly at her.

A strangling terror of herself seized her—a terror of this new and hideous darkness that had descended upon her spirit—a terror of this overmastering impulse which threatened her soul. It was part of the dominance of the flesh that its

senses should be opened only to itself, only to the earthy and the lower. This penalty was already upon her; of all in that congregation, she, only she, must see the bestial lurking everywhere, even in God's house, and in the vestments of His minister.

"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

It was part of their punishment that they could no longer please themselves. Out from every shape of nature and art, from the shadows of grove and the sunshine of open plain, from the crowded street and from the silent church must start forever this spectre, this unsightly comrade of fleshly imagination. This was what it meant to be carnally minded. Margaret's soul was weak and dizzy with pain.

For in some such way will every woman cry. The very purity of her soul will rise to bar out the love that is of earth, earthy—the beautiful

human love so young, so tender-eyed and warm-fingered, and with the lovely earth-light that is about its brows. And then, when the soul grows weary of the pallid thoughts, when the chill of the shadows strikes through—when the walls grow cold and the soul lifts iron bar and chain to let in the human sunshine, then the pale images that throng the house gather and are frightened at the very joy of the sun, and they try to shut the door again against the shining, and sit sorrowful in a trembling dark.

The cry of the woman is, "Give me soul! Give me spirituality!" Oh, loved hand! Oh, eyes! Oh, kissed lips and fondled hair! The woman's love gives to each of you a soul. You will shine for her in her nethermost heaven.

"Tell me not of my love," she cries, "that it is corporeal and must fade! Tell me only that it is of the spirit, a fond and heavenly light, such as never was in earthly sunrise or in evening star! A soul, but not a body! An essence, but no substance! It is too lovely to be of earth, too sweet

to be only of this failing human frame. Its speech is the speech of angels, and its eyes are like the cherubim. Tell me not that it is not all of the soul!" So, until she dreams the last dream of love in earth-gardens, until she closes her soul's eyes to dream of the humanity of love, the dignity of human passion, until then she perfumes the lily and paints the rose.

When the temperament that loves much and is oversensitive opens the gates of its sense to human passion, if its spiritual side recoils, it recoils with self-renunciation and with tears. The pain of such renunciation makes woman's soul weak. Its self-probings and the whips of its conscience, made a very inquisitor, form for her a present horror. She cries out for the old dream, the old ideal, the old faith! It is the tears she sheds for this which drop upon the wall of the world's convention and temper it to steel.

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh to live after the flesh. For, if ye live after

the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

The droning voice of the reader hummed in Margaret's ears. She came to herself again, almost with a start, dimly conscious that the woman in crêpe in the next pew was watching her narrowly. She must sit out the service. She fell to studying the pattern of the embroidery on the altar cloths. It was in curiously woven arabesques, grouped about the monogram of Christ. Anything to withdraw her eyes from the face of the reader, for which she was beginning to feel a growing and unreasoning repulsion.

Throughout the remainder of the sermon she kept her gaze upon her open Bible, turning up mechanically all the cross references to the word "flesh." She followed the contradistinction of flesh and spirit through the New Testament. It was the *flesh* lusting against the *spirit,* and the *spirit* against the *flesh,* contrary the one to the

other. The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life—these all of the world.

The voice of the priest ran along in pauseless flow. It seemed to Margaret that he was repeating, with infinite variations, the same words over and over: "So they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

As she rose for the final benediction, her knees felt weak and she trembled violently. She remembered what happened afterward only confusedly. The next thing she really knew was the sense of a moist apostolic palm pressed against her forehead as she half sat on the stone bench to the right of the entrance, and a smooth, rounded voice saying:

"Mrs. Atherton! Mrs. Starr! will you come back here a moment? This dear young woman appears to be overcome with the heat!"

IV.

Daunt to Margaret.

"New York, Sunday Morning.

"My Very Own!—Is that the way to begin a love letter? Anyhow, it is what I want to say. It is what I have called you a thousand times, to myself, since a one day far back—which I shall tell you about some time—when I made up my mind that you should love me. Does that sound conceited? Did you ever guess it? Over a year I have carried the thought with me; you have loved me only half that time.

"How I have watched your love unfolding! How I have hugged and treasured every new little leaf! I have been afraid so long to touch it; I wanted every petal full-blown, before I picked

it, to be mine—mine, only mine, all mine, as long as I lived.

"Since I left you yesterday, to come up to this dismal city, I have been so happy that I have almost pinched myself to see if I were not asleep. To think that all my richest dreams have come true all at once!

"When I think of it, it makes me feel very humble. I shall be more ambitious. I am going to write better and truer. I must make you proud of me! I am going to work hard. No other man ever had such an incentive to grow—to catch up with ideals—as I have, because no other man ever had you to love.

"Yesterday I went directly from the train to the club. I pulled one of the big chairs into a shaded corner and closed my eyes to feel over and over again the deliciousness of the afternoon. I could feel your body in my arms and your head hard against my shoulder and—that first kiss. It has been on my lips ever since! I haven't dared even to smoke for fear it might vanish!

"All the while I had a curious, vivid, tumultuous sense as though I were in especially close touch with you. It seemed almost as if you wanted to tell me something, and that *I couldn't quite hear.*

"After I went to bed I could not sleep for happiness; I wondered what you had been doing, saying, thinking, dreaming—whether you thought of me much, and, most of all, when you knelt down that night! Shall I always be in the 'Inner Room,' and shall you look in often?

"A letter is such a pitiful makeshift! I could go on writing pages! I want to put my arms around you and whisper it in your ear!

"The church-bells are ringing now. I can picture you sitting in the chapel, just as you do every Sunday, and, maybe sometimes, just a minute of course, stealing a little backward thought of me!

"Always in my mind, you will be linked with red roses, such as you wore *then.* To-day I am sending you down a hamper of them. I should

like to think of you to-night as sleeping nestled up in them, and dreaming their perfume. I am longing to see you. I feel as though I wanted to roll the day up and push it away to get into to-morrow quicker.

"You will hardly be able to read this—my pen runs away with me; but I know you can read what is written over it all and between every two lines—that I love you, I love you wholly, unalterably.

"God keep you, safe and sound, dearest, always, always—for me!

"RICHARD."

Margaret to Daunt.

"Monday.

"I am leaving this morning for a long visit. I cannot see you again. I have made up my mind suddenly—since I saw you Saturday afternoon, I mean. You will think this incomprehensible, I know, but, believe me, I *must* go.

"Think of me as generously as you can. This will hurt you, and to hurt you is the hardest part of it. Do not think that I have treated our association lightly. I could go upon my knees to beg you not to believe that I have been deliberately heartless. Remember me, not as the one who writes you this now, but as the girl who walked with you on the beach and who, for that one hour, thought she saw heaven opened.

"MARGARET LANGDON."

Daunt to Margaret.

"Dear:—You must let me write you. You *must* listen! What does your letter mean? What is the reason? If there had been anything that could come between us, I know you well enough to believe you would have told me before. How can you expect me to accept such a dismissal? I don't understand it. What is it that has changed you? What takes you from me? Surely I have a right to know. Tell me! You can't intend to stay away. It's monstrous! It's unthinkable! Explain this mystery!

"I could not believe, when I received your letter to-day in the city, that you had written it. It seemed an evil dream that I must wake up from. Yet I have come back here to our summer haunt to find it true and you gone. You have even left me no address, and I must direct this letter to your city number, hoping it will be forwarded you.

"How can you ask me to submit to a final sentence like this? I feel numbed and stung by the suddenness of it! I can't find myself. I can do nothing but wrestle with the unguessable why of your going. It's beyond me.

"After that one afternoon on the sands, after that delicious day of realization that my hopes were true—that you loved me—to be flung aside in a moment like an old glove, like a burnt-out match, with no word of explanation, of reason—nothing! It shan't stay so! You can't mean it! You are a woman, a true, sweet woman; you *shan't* make me believe you a soulless flirt! There is something else—something I must know!

"I feel so helpless, writing to you. Space is a monster. If I could only see you for a single moment, I know it would be all right. Write to me. Tell me what I want to know. Until I hear something from you, I shall be utterly, endlessly miserable.

"R. D."

Margaret to Daunt.

"I cannot come back, Richard. I cannot even explain to you why. Don't humiliate me by writing me for reasons. You would not understand me. What good would it do to explain, when I can hardly explain it to myself? I only *feel,* and I am wretched.

"You must forget that afternoon! I am trying to do the right thing—the thing that seems right to myself. I must believe in my instinct; that is all a woman has. I know this letter doesn't tell you anything—I can't—there is no use—I *can't!*

"You know one thing. You must know that that last day, when I kissed you, I did not think of this. I did not intend to go away then. That was all afterward. I had no idea of hurting or wronging you—not the slightest!

"I know this is incoherent. I read over what I have written and the lines get all jumbled up. Somehow it seems to mean nothing. And yet it means so much—oh, so horribly much!—to me.

"M."

Daunt to Margaret.

"Dearest:—Please, please let me reason with you. Don't think me ungenerous; bear with me a little. I *must* make you see it my way! I cheat myself with such endless guessing. Can I have grieved you or disappointed you? Have I shocked those beautiful white ideals of yours in any way? If that walk on the shore had been a month ago, if we had been together since, I might believe this; but we have not. That was the last, *and you loved me then!* I brought my naked heart to you that afternoon—it had been yours for long!—and laid it in your hand. You took it and kissed me, and I went away without it. Have you weighed it in the balance and found it wanting? Do you doubt what it could give you? Dear, let it try!

"To-day I walked up the old glen where the deserted cabin is. The very breeze went whispering of you and the rustling of every bush

sounded like your name. The sky was duller and the grass less green. Even the squirrels sat up to ask where you were with the chestnuts you always brought them. Nothing is the same; I am infinitely lonely here, and yet I stay on where everything means you! When I walk it seems as if you must be waiting, smiling, just around every bend of the rock—just behind every clump of ferns—to tell me it was all a foolish fancy, that you love me and have not gone away! You are all things to me, dear. I cannot live without you. I want you—I need you so! I never knew how much before.

"Only tell me what your letters have not, that you do not love me—that you were mistaken—that it was all a folly, a madness—and I will never ask again! Ah, but I know you will not; you cannot. You do! *You do!* I have that one moment to remember when I held you in my arms, when your throat throbbed against my cheek, when your lips were on mine, when your arms went up around my head, and when I

could feel your heart beating quick against me. Your breath was trembling and your eyes were like stars! Can you ask me to forget that, the moment that I seemed to have always lived and kept myself for?

"It's impossible! This must be a passing mood of yours which will vanish. Love is a stronger thing than that! I don't know the thing that is troubling you—I can't guess it—but I am sure of *you.* I know you in a larger, deeper way, and in the end you will never disappoint me in that!

"I am hoping, longing, waiting. Let me come to you! Let me see you face to face, and read there what the matter is!

"Remember that I am still

"Your own,

"R."

Margaret to Daunt.

"'THE BEECHES,' WARNE.

"I have been touched by your last letter. I had not intended to write again, yet somehow it seems as if I must. Can you read between these lines that I am unhappy? I have been to blame, Richard, so much to blame; but I didn't know it till afterward.

"I can't answer your question; it isn't whether I love you—it's *how*. Doesn't that tell you anything? I mustn't be mistaken in the *way*. You must not try to see me; it would only make me more wretched than I am now, and that is a great deal more than I could ever tell you.

"M."

Daunt to Margaret.

"If you won't have any pity for yourself, for heaven's sake have some for me! What am *I* to do? *I* haven't any philosophy to bear on the situation. I can't understand your objections. Your way of reasoning your emotions is simply ghastly. The Lord never intended them to be reasoned with! We can't think ourselves into love or out of it either. At least *I* can't. I've gone too far to go backward. Since you went I have been one long misery—one long, aching homesickness.

"You ask me not to 'humiliate' you by asking for your reasons. Don't you think *I* am humiliated? Don't you think *I* suffer, too? And yet it isn't that; my love isn't so mean a thing that it is my vanity that is hurt most. If I believed you didn't love me, that might be; but if you could leave me as you have—without a chance to speak, with nothing but a line or two that only maddened me—you wouldn't hesitate to tell me the truth now.

"You *do* love me, Margaret! You're torturing yourself and torturing me with some absurd hallucination. Forgive me, dear—I don't mean that—only it's all so puzzling and it hurts me so! I'm all raw and bleeding. My nerves are all jangles.

"I can only see one thing clearly—that you are wrong, and you'll see it. Only somehow I can't make you see it yet!

"DAUNT."

V.

The warm October weather lay over the Drennen homestead at Warne. This was a house gigantic and austere, its gray stone walls throwing into relief its red brick porch, veined with ivy stems, like an Indian's face, whose warrior blood is raging, leant against a rock boulder.

Under the shade of the falling vine-fringe Margaret sat, passive and quiet, on the veranda. From under drooping lids, long-lashed, her brown eyes looked out with a sort of sweet and sober studiousness. Her reddish-brown hair appeared the color of old metal beaten by the hammer here and there into a lighter flick of gold, rolling back from her straight forehead and caught in a loose, low knot. The corners of her

mouth were lifted a little, giving an extra fulness to sensitive lips, and the long rise of her cheek, from chin to temple, was without a dimple.

The haze hung an opal tint over the blue hillsides and lent to nearer objects a dreamy unreality. The atmosphere reflected Margaret's mood. She was conscious of a certain tired numbness. Her acts of the past few weeks had a sort of elusiveness in perspective, and the old house at Warne, with its gloomy stables, taciturn servants, its familiar occupants—even she herself—seemed to possess a curious unreality.

Across the field ran the wavering fringe of willow which marked the little sluggish brook with the foot-log, where often she had waded, slim-legged, as a child. There was the old stable loft from which she had once fallen, hunting for pigeons' eggs. There were the same gloomy holes under the eaves, from which awful bat shapes had issued for her childish shuddering. Only the master of the house was changed, and he was Melwin Drennen, Lydia's husband. As a

child, he had carried her on his shoulders over the fields when she had visited the place. She had liked him unaffectedly, and the great sorrow of his life had hurt her also.

She was a mere child then, and had heard it with a vague and wondering pain. It had been a much-talked-of match—that between her cousin and this man—and it was only a week after the wedding, at this same old place, that the accident had happened. Lydia had been thrown from her horse. She was carried back to a house of mourning. The decorations were taken from the walls, and great surgeons came down from the city to ponder, shake their heads, and depart. He, loving much, had hoped against hope. Margaret remembered hearing how he had sat all one night outside her door, silent, with his head against the wainscoting and his hands tight together—the night they said she would die.

And that was twelve years ago! She had bettered slightly, grown stronger, walked a little, then declined again. Now for five years past her

life had been a colorless exchange of bed and reclining-chair, and, in this period, she had never left the house.

Margaret shivered in the sun as she thought. At intervals she had heard of his life. "Such a *lovely* life!" people said. She had thought of his self-sacrifice and devotion as something very beautiful. It had been an ever-present ideal to her of spiritual love. In her own self-dissatisfaction she had flown to this haven instinctively, as to a dear example. A strange desire to stab herself with the visual presence of her own lack had possessed her. But in some way the steel had failed her. She was conscious now of a vague self-reproach that her greater sorrow was for Melwin and not for the invalid. Surely Lydia was the one to be sorry for, and yet there was an awfulness about the life he led that she was coming to feel acutely.

The crying incompletion, the negative hollowness of it, had smote her. His full life had stopped, like a sluggish stream. His vitality, his

energies, could not go ahead. He was bound through all these years to the body of this death. Love had broadened his gaze, lifted his horizon, and then Fate had suddenly reared this crystal, impassable wall, through which he must ever gaze and ever be denied. He was condemned still to love her and to watch agonizedly the slender gradations, the imperceptible stages by which she became less and less of her old self to him.

Margaret gazed out across the velvet edge of the hills, and felt a sense of dissatisfaction in the color harmony. A doubt had darkened the windows of her soul and turned the golden sunlight to a duller chrome. She was so absorbed that she caught a sharp breath as the French window behind her clicked raspingly and swung inward on its hinges. It was Melwin.

He came slowly forward through the window, holding his head slightly on one side as though he listened for something behind him. She found herself wondering how he had acquired

the habit. His face was motionless and set, with a peculiar absence of placidity—like a graven image with topaz eyes. To Margaret it suggested a figure on an Egyptian bas-relief, and yet he looked much the same, she thought, as he had ten years before. Perhaps his beard was grayer and he was more stoop-shouldered, and—yes, his temples looked somehow hollower and older. He had a way of pausing just before the closing word of a question, giving it a quaint and unnatural emphasis, and of gazing above and past one when he spoke or answered. When he had first greeted her on her arrival, Margaret had turned instinctively in the belief that he had spoken to some one unperceived behind her.

"Will you go in to—Lydia?" he said, difficultly. "I think she wants you."

As Margaret came down the stairway a moment later, tying the ribbons of her broad hat under her chin, his look of inquiry met her at the door, and the tinge of eagerness in his lack-

lustre eyes faded back into stolidity again as she told him it was only an errand for Lydia.

She jumped from the piazza and raced around the drive toward the stables. Creed, the coachman, whose wool was growing gray in a lifetime of allegiance to the Whiting stock, was standing by the window, holding a harvest apple for the black, reaching lip and white, impatient teeth of his favorite charge inside the stall. He dropped his currycomb as he saw her.

"Mornin', Miss Marg'et. Want me fur sump'n?"

"No, I only came for Mrs. Drennen to see how Sempire's foot is. She says he stepped on a stone."

The black face puckered with a puzzled look, that broadened into a smile the next instant.

"Marse Drennen done tole dat to Miss Liddy ez a skuse fo' he not ridin' mo'. She all de time tryin' to mek he git out an' gallavant. He ain't nuver gwine do dat no mo'. Miss Liddy, she

al'ays worryin' feared Marse Drennen moutn't joy heseff, an' he al'ays worryin' cause she worryin'. She mek up all kinds ob things fur he to do dat way, an' he jes humor her to think he do 'em, an' she nuver know no diffunce."

Margaret had seated herself on the step and was looking up. "You've always been with her, haven't you?"

Creed smiled to the limit of his heavy lips. "'Deed I hev. When Miss Liddy wuz married she purty nigh fou't to fotch me wid her. Her ole maid sister, she wantter keep me wid dee all back dar in New O'leens. You see I knowed Miss Liddy when she warn't a hour ole an' no bigger'n a teapot.

"Meh mammy wuz nussin' de li'l mite in her lap wid a hank'cher ober her, an' I tip in right sorf to cyar a hick'ry lorg an' drap on de fiah. Dat li'l han' upped an' pull de hank'cher offen her face an' look at me till I git cl'ar th'oo de do'. She wuz de peartest, forward'st young 'un! An'

she growed up lak she started, too. Marse Drennen he proud lak a peacock when he come down dyar frum de Norf an' cyared her off wid he."

"I remember how pretty she was." Margaret spoke softly.

"Does yo' sho 'nuff? She wuz jes 'bout yo' age den. Her ha'r wuz de color ob a gole dollar, an' her eyes wuz blue ez a catbird's aig. She wuz strong as a saplin', an' she walk high lak a hoss whut done tuck de blue ribbon et de fa'r."

Sempire arched his shining neck and whinnied gently for another apple. Creed stroked the intelligent face affectionately. "Whut mek yo' go juckin' dat way?" he said. "Cyarn't you see I'se talkin' to de ledy?"

He looked into the fresh young face beneath the straw hat with its nodding poppies and drew a deep breath.

"It do hurt me, honey, to see de change! Don't keer how hard I wucks, I feels lonesome to see how de laugh an' song done died in her froat.

'Twuz jes one stumble dat done it. She an' Marse Drennen wuz gallopin' on befo' de yuthers. Pres'n'y she look back to see ef I wuz comin'. De win' wuz blowin' her purty ha'r 'bout ev'y way, an' her eyes wuz sparklin' jes lak de sun on de ice in de waggin ruts. Jes dat minit de hoss slip, an' I holler an' he done drap in er heap on he knees, an' Miss Liddy she fall er li'l way off an' lay still.

"Seem lak meh heart jump up in meh mouf. I wuz de fust one dyar. She wuz layin' wid her ha'r ober her face an' her po' li'l back all bent up agin de groun'!

"Marse Drennen he go on turrible. He kneel down dyar in de road an' kiss her awful, an' beg her to open her eyes, an' say he gwine kill dat hoss sho'. Den we cyared her back to de house, an' she nuver know nuttin' fo' days an' days. De gre't doctors do nuttin' fer her. She jes lay an' lay, an' et seem lak she couldn't move, only her haid. Marse Drennen he nuver leabe her. He jes

set in de cheer an' rock heseff back an' forf lak a baby an' look at her an' moan same's he feelin' et too.

"He don' nuver git ober et no mo'. Peers lak she'd git erlong better now ef he didn't grieve so. He hole he haid up al'ays when he roun' her. He wuz bleeged to do dat, to keep her from seein' he disapp'inted, 'cause she wuz al'ays sickly an' in baid to nuver rekiver. He face sorter light up wid her lookin' on, an' he try to cheer her up, meckin' out dat tain' meck no diffunce. Hit did, do'! He git out o' her sight, he look so moanful; he ain't jolly an' laughin' lak when he wuz down Souf co'tin', an' I hole he hoss till way late.

"She al'ays thinkin' ob him now, an' he don' keer fer nuttin'—jes sit wid he chin in bofe han's on de po'ch lookin' down. He heart done got numbed. Seems lak de blood done dried up in he veins an' some time he gwine to shribble up lak er daid tree whut nuver gwine show no red an' yaller leabes no mo'. He jes live al'ays lak he done los' sump'n he couldn' fin' nowhar."

Margaret arose from the step as he paused and turned his dusky face away to pick up the fallen currycomb.

As she walked back to the house Melwin's figure as she had seen him on the porch rose before her memory—the face of a sleeper, with the look of another man in another life. Before her misty eyes it hung like a suspended mask against the background of the drab stone walls.

VI.

The frost scouts of the marshalling winter had fallen upon the woods which skirted the Drennen estate, and the great beeches were crimsoning in their death flush; the maples enchanting with their fickle foliage, some still clinging to their green, and others brilliant with blushes that they must soon stand naked before the cold stare of the sky. Here and there on some aspiring knoll a slim poplar rose like a splendid bouquet of starting yellow.

At a turn of the road, which wound leisurely between seamed tree-boles, Margaret had seated herself upon a lichened slab of stone. Her loosely braided hair lay against the hood of her scarlet cloak, slipping from her shoulders, and she seemed, in her vivid beauty, the incarnate

spirit of the blazonry of fall. Her head was bare and her clasped hands, dropped between her knees, held a slender book, a random selection from the litter of the library table. It was the story of Marpessa, and unconsciously she had folded down the leaf at the lines she had just read:

"I love thee then
Not only for thy body packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose, sweet in the night of life;
Nor for that stirring bosom all besieged
By drowsing lovers, or thy perilous hair;
* * * * * *
Not for this only do I love thee, but
Because Infinity upon thee broods,
And thou art full of whispers and of shadows.
Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearnèd up the cliffs to tell;
Thou art what all the winds have uttered not,
What the still night suggesteth to the heart.
Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,
Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea;
Thy face remembered is from other worlds;
It has been died for, though I know not when,

It has been sung of, though I know not where.
It has the strangeness of the luring West,
And of sad sea-horizons; beside thee
I am aware of other times and lands,
Of birth far back, of lives in many stars."

With the broadening half-smile upon her parted lips and that far splendor in her eyes, she looked as might have looked the earthly maiden for whom the fair god and the passionate human Idas pledged their loves before great Zeus.

The deadened trampling of horse's hoofs upon the soft, shaly road beat in upon her reverie. The horse, moving briskly, was abreast of her as she started to her feet. There was a sharp, surprised exclamation from the rider, a snort of fear from the animal as he shied and plunged sideways from the flaring apparition. Almost before she could cry out—so quickly that she could never afterward recall how it happened—the thing was done. The frantic brute reared white-eyed, rose and pawed, wheeling, and the rider, with one foot caught and dragging from the stirrup-iron,

was down upon the ground. Margaret, without reflection, acted instantly. With a single bending spring of her lithe body she was beside the creature's head, her slender arms, like stripped willow branches, straining and tugging at his bit, until the steel clamps cut into her flesh. She threw all the power of her arm upon the heavy jaw, and with one hand reached and clasped tight just above the great steaming, flame-notched nostrils. The fierce head shook from side to side an instant, then the lifting hoofs became calm, and he stood still, trembling. Slipping her hand to the bridle, she turned her head for the first time and was face to face with Daunt.

She gazed at him speechless, with widening eyes. A leaping joy at the sight of him mixed itself with a realization of his past peril. She felt her face whiten under his steadfast gaze. A thousand times she had imagined how they might meet, what she might say, how she would act, and now, without a breath of warning, Fate

had set him there beside her. His hand lay next hers upon the rein of the animal, which a single faltering of her finger, a drooping of her eyelash would have left to drag him helpless to a terrible death. A breathless thanksgiving was in her soul that she had not swerved in foot or hand.

Suddenly she noticed that his left hand hung limp, and her whole being flamed into sympathy. "Oh, your poor wrist! You have hurt it!" Her fingers drew his arm up to her sight. Her look caressed his hand.

"It's nothing," he said hastily, but with compressed lips. "I must have wrenched it when I tumbled. How awkward of me!"

"It was I who frightened your horse; and no wonder, when I jumped up right under his feet."

"And in that cloak, too!" he said, his eye noting the buoyancy of her beauty and its grace of curve.

The rebellious waves of her brown hair had filched rosy lustres from her garb, and the blood painted her cheeks with a stain like wild moss-

berries. Her eyes chained his own. She had not yet released his hand, but was touching it with the purring regard of a woman for an injured pet. The allurement of her physical charm seemed to him to pass from her finger-tips like pricklings of electricity from a Leyden jar.

Daunt shook off her hand with an uncontrollable gesture, and with his one arm still thrust through the bridle, drew her close to him and kissed her—kissed her hair, her forehead, her half-opened eyes, her mouth, her throat, her neck.

She felt his lips scorch through her cloak. He dropped upon his knees, still holding her, and showered kisses upon the rough folds of her gown.

"Margaret!" he cried, "you know why I have come! You know what I want! I want you! Forgive me, but I couldn't stay away. Do you suppose I thought you meant what you said in those letters? Why should you run away from me? Why did you leave me as you did? What is the matter?"

As he looked up at her, he saw that the light had died out of her eyes. Her lips were trembling. Her face was marked by lines of weariness. She repulsed him gently and went back a few steps, gazing at him sorrowfully.

"You shouldn't have come," she said then. "You ought to have stayed away! You make it so hard for me!"

"Hard?" His voice rose a little. "Don't you love me? Have you quit caring for me? Is that it?"

"No—not that."

"Do you suppose," he went on, "that I will give you up, then? You can't love a man one day and not love him the next! You're not that sort! Do you think I would have written you—do you think for one minute I would have come here, if I hadn't known you loved me? What *is* this thing that has come between us? What *is* it takes you from me? Doesn't love mean anything? Tell me!" he said, as she was silent. "Don't stand there that way!"

"How can I?" she cried. "I tried to tell you in those letters."

"Letters!" There was a rasp in Daunt's voice. "What did they tell me? Only that there was some occult reason—Heaven only knows what—why it was all over; why I was not to see you again. Do you suppose that's enough for me? You don't know me!"

"No, but I know myself."

"Well, then, I know you better than you know yourself. You said you didn't want to see me again! That was a lie! You *do* want to see me again! You're nursing some foolish self-deception. You're fighting your own instincts."

"I'm fighting myself," she said; "I'm fighting what is weak and miserably wrong. I can't explain it to you. It isn't that I don't know what you think. I don't know where I stand with myself."

"You loved me!" he burst forth, in a tone almost of rage. "You *loved* me! You know you did! Great God! you don't want me to think

you didn't love me that day, do you?" he said, a curiously hard expression coming into his eyes.

"I don't know." She spoke wearily. "I—don't—know. How *can* I know? Don't you see, it isn't what I thought then—it isn't what I did. It's what was biggest in my thought. Oh—" she broke off, "you can't understand! You *can't!* It's no use. You're not a woman."

"No," he said roughly, "I'm not a woman. I'm only a man, and a man feels!"

"I know you think that of me," she said humbly. "But, indeed, indeed, I don't mean to be cruel—only to myself."

"No, I suppose not!" retorted Daunt bitterly. "Women never mean things! Why should they? They leave that to men! Do you suppose," he said with quick fierceness, "that there is anything left in life for me? Is it that I've fallen in your estimation? You thought I was strong, perhaps, and now you have come to the conclusion that I'm weak! And the fact that it was *you* and that

you felt too makes no difference. I've heard of women like that, but I never believed there were any! You wash your feeling entirely out of your conscience, and I'm the one who must hang for it. And in spite of it all, you're human! Do you think I don't know that?"

She put out her hands as if to ward off a tangible blow. "Don't," she said weakly, "please don't!"

"Don't?" he repeated. "Does it hurt to speak of it? Do you want to forget it? Do you think I ever shall? I don't want to. It's all I shall have to remind me that once you had a heart!"

"No! no!" she cried vehemently. "You *must* understand me better than that! Don't you see that I want to do what you say? Don't you see that my only way is to fight it? It is I who am weak! Oh, it seems in the past month I have learned so much! I am too wise!"

"Wait," he said; "can you say truly in your heart that you do not love me?"

"That—isn't it," she stammered.

"It is!" he flamed. "Tell me you don't love me and I will go away."

She was silent, twisting up her fingers with a still intensity.

"Tell me!"

"But there's so much in loving. It has so many parts. We love so many ways. We have more of us than our bodies. We have souls."

"I'm not a disembodied spirit," he broke in. "I don't love you with any sub-conscious essence. I don't believe in any isms. I love you with every fibre of my body—with every beat of my heart—with every nerve and with every thought of my brain! I love you as every other man in all the world loves every other woman in the world. I'm human; and I'm wise enough to know that God made us human with a purpose. He knows better than all the priests in the world. How do you *want* to be loved? I tell you I love you with all—*all*—body and mind and soul! Now do you understand?"

"It's not that!" she cried. "It's how I love you. Oh, no; I don't mean that!"

"I don't care how you love me!" he retorted. "I'll take care of that! You loved me enough that once."

"Ah, that's just it! I forgot everything. I forgot myself and you! I wanted the touch of your hands—of your face! There was nothing else in the whole world! Oh!" she gasped, "do you think I thought of my soul then?"

"Listen!" he said, coming toward her so that she could feel his hot breaths. "You're morbid. You're unstrung. You have an idea that one ought to love in some subtle, supernatural, heavenly way. That's absurd. We are made with flesh-and-blood bodies. We have veins that run and nerves that feel. You are trying to forget that you have a heart. We are not intended to be spirits—not until after we die, at any rate."

"But we *have* spirits."

"Yes," he answered, "but it's only through our hearts, through our mind's hopes, through our

affections, that we know it. All our soul's nourishment comes through the senses. That's what they were given us for."

"But one must rule—one must be master."

Daunt leaned toward her and caught both her hands in his one. "Ardee, dear," he said more softly, "don't push me off like this! Don't resist so! I love you—you know I do. This is only some unheard-of experiment in emotion. Let it go! There's nothing in the world worth breaking both our hearts for this way. There can't be any real reason! Come to me, dear! Come back! Come back! Won't you?"

At the softness of his tone her eyes had filled slowly with tears.

"I mustn't! Oh, I mustn't! The happiness would turn into a curse. You mustn't ask me!"

Daunt struggled between a rising pity for her suffering and a helpless frenzy of irritation. Between the two he felt himself choking. There seemed in her a resistance and an implacable hostility that he was as powerless to combat as to

understand. He began to comprehend the terrible strength that lies in consistent weakness. There was something far worse in her silent mood than there could have been in a storm of reproaches or of vehement denial. He felt that if he spoke again he could but raise higher the barrier between them, which would not be beaten down by sheer force. He mounted, stumblingly and blindly, his left hand awkwardly swinging, and, turning his horse's head, spurred him into a vicious trot.

A bit of golden-rod had dropped from his button-hole when he had crushed her in his embrace, and as he disappeared down the curved road, under the passionate foliage, Margaret slipped upon her knees and caught the dusty blossom to her face in agonized abandon. Tears came to her in a gusty whirl of longing, and strangling sobs tore at her throat.

VII.

Nightshade and wistaria. The lusty poison-vine and the delicate climbing tendrils. The evil and the pure. Their snake-like stems wound about each other, twining in sinuous intimacy, the cardinal berries flaunting alone where the fragrant purple blooms had long since fallen. They clung to each other, the enmeshed and alien branches veiling a sightless trunk, whose rotted limbs, barkless and neglected, projected bare knobs complainingly from the vagrant tangle. It drew Margaret's steps, and she went closer. The dogs that had followed yelping at her heels, after she had tired of throwing sticks for them to fetch, now went nosing off across the orchard in canine unsympathy with her reflective mood.

She stood a monochrome, in roughish brown tweed, under the dappling shadows.

"Miss Langdon, I believe?"

The deep, resonant voice recalled her. She saw a smooth-shaven face with the rounded outline that belongs to youth, and is but rarely the heritage of age, surmounted by the striking incongruity of perfectly milk-white hair. His lips were thin and firm, suggesting at one time strength and firmness, and the glance which met her from the frank, hazel eyes was one of open friendliness. His clerical coat was close-buttoned to his vigorous chin.

"I am Dr. Craig," he said, "rector of Trinity parish. I heard that Mrs. Drennen had a cousin visiting her, and I came out to ask you to come to our Sabbath services. We haven't as ambitious a choir, perhaps, as you have in your city church," he said, smiling, "—though we have one tenor voice which I think quite remarkable—but we offer the same message and just as warm a welcome."

Her loneliness had wanted just such a greeting. "I shall be glad to come!" she answered. "I passed the church only yesterday and sat awhile in the porch to rest. It is so peaceful, set among the trees!"

"You seemed entirely out of the world as I walked up the path," he said. "I could almost see you think."

"I was looking at this." She pointed to the clustering vines.

"What an audacious climber! Its berries have the color of rubies. And a wistaria, too!"

"I was thinking when you came," she continued hesitatingly, "what a pity it was that the two should have ever grown together. The wistaria has an odor like far-away incense, and its leaves are tender and delicate-veined, like a climbing soul. The nightshade is dark green and its berries are sin-color. They don't belong together, and now nobody in the world could ever pull them apart without killing them both. Isn't it a pity?"

"Ah, there is where I think you err! That bold, aspiring sap is just what the pallid wistaria needs. Its perfume is less insipid for the mingling earth-smell of the other. It climbs higher and reaches further for the other's strength. The flora of nature follows the same great law as humanity. Opposite elements combine to make the strongest men and women. One of the most valuable, I think, of the suggestions we get from the vegetable creation is the thought of its comprehensive good. Nothing that is useful is bad, and there is nothing that has not its use. What we know is, the higher grows and develops by means of the lower." His fine face lifted as he spoke with conscious dignity.

To Margaret, in the untiring challenge of her self-questionings, his view brought an unworded solace. Her mind grasped eagerly at his thought, puzzled by itself, yet reaching for the visible spirituality of the man. His face, calm and with a tinge of almost priestly asceticism, was a tacit reassurance. A wish to hear him speak, to talk

to him, came to her. He had lived longer than she, he knew so much more! If she could only ask him! If she only knew how to begin! If some instinct could only whisper to his mind's ear the benumbing question her whole being battled with, without her having to put it into words! Even if she could—even if he could guess it—he might misunderstand. No girl ever had such thoughts before! They were only hers —only hers, to hide, to bury in silence! She blushed hotly to think that she had ever thought of voicing it to the air. A guilty horror, lest her face might betray what she was thinking, bathed her. She could never, never tell it! There could be no help from outside. Her mind must struggle with it alone.

She started visibly, with a feeling that she had been overheard, at a crunching step behind them. Her companion greeted the arrival with the heartiness of an old acquaintance.

"Ah, Condy," he said, "much obliged for that

salve of yours. It has quite made a new dog of Birdo."

"Thet so?" inquired the newcomer, with interest. "Et's a powerful good salve." His straggling yellow beard and much-battered straw hat shed a mellow lustre on his leathery, suntanned face, where twinkled clear blue eyes.

"I've jest been up by th' kennels," he volunteered.

"I hope you found the family all well?" the rector inquired, with gravely humorous concern.

"Toler'ble. Th' ole mastiff won't let me git clost 'nough t' say more'n howdy do. He's wuss 'n a new town marshal!" He rasped a sulphur match against his trouser-leg and lit his short clay pipe, hanging his head awkwardly to do so, and disclosing the inquisitive muzzle and beady eyes of a diminutive setter pup, which he carried under his butternut coat, supported in his forearm. Margaret patted the cold nose, and its owner displayed it pridefully.

"He ain't but three weeks old," he said, "en'

I'm a-bringin' him up on th' bottle. Ef I fetch him eround he'll make a fine setter one o' these days, fer he's got good points. Look at th' shape o' his toes! Et goes agin my grain t' lose a puppy. Somehow et seems ez ef they hev ez much right t' live ez some other people." His mouth relaxed broadly about his pipe-stem, with a damp smile.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the rector.

"Jest ailin', puny like. Dogs ez a lot like babies; some on 'em could be littered en' grow up in a snowdrift, en' others could be born in a straw kennel en' die ef you look at 'em. This one was so weakly thet Bess, my ole setter, wouldn't look at him. Jest poked him eround with her nose, poor little devil! en' wouldn't give him ez much ez a lick. Et's a funny thing," he continued, stuffing down the embers in his pipe with a hard forefinger, "th' difference there ez thet way between dogs en' folks. I never seen a woman yit thet wouldn't take all kinds o' keer fer

a sick baby, but a dog puts all her nussin' on her healthy young uns en' lets th' ailin' shift fer theirselves. Mebbe et's because she hez so many all at once, but I guess it'd be the same with women ef they hed a dozen at once ez et ez now. The parson here"—he blinked at Margaret with a suspicion of levity—"says ez how et's because th' dogs ain't got no souls. I don't know how thet ez, but et looks ez ef et might be so."

The rector laughed good-humoredly as the decreasing figure silhouetted itself against the field. "Condy's a unique character," he said, "but immensely likable. He has a quaint philosophy that isn't down in the books, but it's none the less interesting for that. I must be going now," he continued; " sermons in stones and books in running brooks won't do for my congregation."

"You will go up to the house and see Lydia?"

"I have already seen her. She told me I should find you somewhere in the fields, she thought. Your cousin is a great sufferer," he added gently. "She is a beautiful character—uncomplaining

under a most grievous affliction. I am deeply sorry for her, and yet"—there was a note of perplexity in his voice—"sometimes I believe I pity her husband even more! I am not well acquainted with him personally. I wish I might know him better. She often speaks to me of him. Her love for him is most exquisite; it always reminds me of the perfume of the night-blooming-cereus."

He took his leave of Margaret with grave courtesy and left her standing on the leaf-littered grass, with the red berries of the nightshade gleaming through the rank green foliage above her head.

VIII.

Lydia's reclining chair had been rolled close to the window and Margaret sat beside her, contemplating a melancholy drizzle, mingled with sweeping gusts of rain. The chickens stood in huddled groups under the garden shrubs, and the white and yellow chrysanthemums, from their long, bordering beds, shook out their frowsy petals and drank rejoicingly. Margaret loved to watch the splash of the shower upon the fallen leaves. Her nature reflected no neutral tints; rain and gray weather to her had never been coupled with sadness.

The emaciated hands by her side moved restlessly in the afghan. "What a bad day for Mell," she said. "He is fond of the saddle, and now he

will come home wet and cold, before his ride is half finished."

Margaret looked at her curiously. She recalled Sempire's stone-bruise and Creed's version of it. Melwin she had left only a few minutes before, sitting statue-like in the library, with his chin upon his hands. She felt with a smarting of her eyelids that the pathetic deception was but a part of the consideration, the tender, watching guard with which he surrounded the invalid's every thoughtfulness of him.

"Margaret!" Lydia spoke almost appealingly, laying a hand upon her arm, "do you think Mell seemed happy to-day? You remember him when we were married? I've seen him toss you many a time, as a little girl, on his shoulder. Don't you remember how he used to laugh when he would pretend to let you fall over backward? Does he seem to you to be any different now? Not older—I don't mean that (of course he is some older)—but soberer. He used to have friends out from the city, and be always bird-

hunting or playing polo. I could go with him then; he liked to have me. He used to say he wanted to show me off. He seems to be so much more alone now, and to care less for such things. At first it made me happy to think that he couldn't enjoy them any longer when I couldn't share them with him. That was very selfish, I know, and now his not taking pleasure in them is a pain to me. I want him to. He is so good to me! It seems sometimes as if I were a reproach to him. I am so helpless, useless—such a hindering burden. I can't do anything but go on loving him. If I could only help him! If I could dust his desk, or fill his pipe, or tend the primroses he loves, or put the buttons in his shirts for him, or do any one of the thousand little foolish things that a woman loves to do for her husband!"

Reaching over, Margaret patted her hand gently. The patient eyes looked up at her hungrily.

"Oh, Margaret, if I could only know that he

was happy! If I could only fill his life wholly, completely, to the brim! I feel so bodiless lying here. Other women must mean so much more to their husbands. I used to pray to die—to be taken away from him. I thought that he would love me better dead. Love doesn't die that way—it's living that kills love. And I couldn't bear to think that I might live to see it die slowly, horribly, little by little; and I watched, oh, so jealously! for the first sign. It's a dreadful thing to be jealous of life! I have thought that if it could be right for him to marry another woman while I was still his wife—one who could give him all I lack—that I would even be content, if he were only happy! There is just my mind left now for him to love, and the mind, so denied, rusts away."

"But your *soul* is alive," said Margaret softly, "and that is what we love and love with. It seems to me that the most beautiful thing in the world is a love like Melwin's for you—one that is all spirit. It is like the love of a child for a white

star, that is not old and dusty like the earth, but pure and shining and very, very far above its head. When I was little I used to have one particular star that I called my own. I wouldn't have been happier to have touched it or to have had it any nearer. I was contented just to look up to it and love it."

"You're a genuine comforter!" said Lydia, a smile of something more nearly approaching joy than Margaret had yet seen there playing upon her lips. "I am ungrateful. It is wicked of me to repine as I do! God has given me Mell's love, and every day it winds closer around me. And he loves my soul. I ought to think how much more blest I am than other women whose husbands do not care for them! I ought to spend my time thinking of him and not of myself! Perhaps I could plan more little pleasures for him. We used to make so many pretty surprises for each other, and we got so much happiness out of them. It is the small things in life that please us most. When we were first married, I studied

all the little ways. I wore the colors he was fond of, and did my hair as he thought was most becoming. Why, I wouldn't have put on a ribbon or a flower that I thought he did not like! He set so much store by those things. Do you see that big closet on the other side of the room? Open the door. There are all the dresses that Mell liked me in when we were married. Do you see that pearl liberty silk with the valenciennes? I had that on the last night we ever danced together—the night before I was hurt. He liked me best of all in that."

She passed her hand caressingly over the shimmering lengths which Margaret had spread out across her knees. "You would look well in such a gown," she said. "Your hair is like mine was, only a shade darker. Put the skirt on. There! It fits you, too!"

A stir of anticipation, of excitement, overspread her languor. "I want you to do me a favor; I don't believe you'll mind! Take dinner to-night with Melwin downstairs. I am tired to-

day and I shall go to sleep early. Wear the dress; maybe it will remind him of the way I looked then, when I had the same roses in my cheeks. He called them holly berries. Will you wear it?"

Margaret turned away under pretense of examining the yellow lace. "Oh, yes," she said, "and I have a cameo pin that will just suit to clasp it at the throat."

"No, no!" Lydia had half raised herself on her elbow. "In my box on the dresser is a string of pearls. Mell gave me them to go with it."

She took the ornament and, with an exclamation of delight, unfastened the neck of her nightgown and clasped it around her throat. Dropping her chin to see how the lustreless spheres drooped across the pitiful hollows of her neck, she gave them back with a sigh that was sadder than any words and turned her head wearily on the pillow.

Margaret gathered up the garments tenderly, and bent over and left a light kiss on the faded cheek as she went from the room.

IX.

Margaret stood before the cheval-glass in Lydia's gown, smiling at the quaint reflection. It showed a figure with slim, pointed waist between billowy paniers, flounced with Spanish frill after the fashion of a decade before. The neck was square-cut and the tight sleeves reached to the elbow, ending in a fall of lace. It was not unbecoming to her. Her brown eyes had borrowed from the pearl tint a misty violet and the springing growth of her hair had taken on the shade of wet broom-straw. A faint glow rose in her cheeks as she surveyed her own stirring image. She clasped the close necklace of pearls about her throat. Poor Lydia! Something as fair she must have looked in that old time so rudely ended! Poor Melwin!

The wide dining-room doors stood open, and she did not pause, but went directly in. The old butler stood in the hall, and she noticed wonderingly that he gazed at her with a scared expression and moved backward, his arms stretched behind him in an instinctive gesture of fright which puzzled her. Were even the ancient servitors of the house as incomprehensible as was their master?

Melwin stood leaning against the polished rosewood sideboard, his unseeing gaze fixed on a glass-prismed candelabra of antique workmanship, whose pendants vibrated ceaselessly. His lifted stare, which went beyond, suddenly caught and fastened itself upon her in a look of startled fascination. His lean fingers gripped the edge of the wood and he stiffened all over like a wild animal couched to spring. His shrunken features were marked with a convulsion of fearful anguish. Margaret shrank back dismayed at the lambent fire that had leaped into his colorless eyes.

"Lydia!" The cry burst from his lips as he made a quick step toward her.

"Why, Melwin!" she gasped, "what is the matter?"

The table was between them, but she could see that he was shaking. His eyes turned from her to the opposite wall, then back again. Her gaze followed his and rested upon a splendid full-length portrait. She knew at once that it was Lydia. But she saw in that one instant more than this; she saw her own face, radiant, sparkling, the same lightened, straw-tinted hair, the same shadowy violet eyes, the same gown, pearl gray, quaintly cut, that had faced her in the depths of the cheval-glass.

"Melwin, don't you know me? Why, it's I—Margaret!"

His lips lifted from his teeth. Even through the strained agony of his face, she could have imagined him about to laugh. It seemed a minute before his voice came, and when it did it

scourged her like a sting of a lash. She cringed under its livid fury.

"How dare you? How *dare* you come to me like that? Do you think a man is a stone? Do you think he has no feeling, that you can torture him like this? Do you think he never remembers or suffers? Is there nothing in his past that's too sacred to lay hands upon?"

"It was Lydia, Melwin," cried Margaret, her fingers wandering stumblingly along the low neck of the gown; "she asked me to do it. She thought it would please you. She thought it would remind you of the way she used to look."

"She told you?" A softer expression came to his face. The hard lines fell away; the weary ghost of an unborn smile hovered on his lips, trembling and pathetic.

"Don't care! Please, please don't look so! I didn't think! I will go away at once and take the dress off."

He laid his arms upon the back of a chair and

dropped his head upon them. "Don't mind me, child," he said brokenly; "you couldn't help it. You didn't understand. When a man's flesh has been bruised with pincers, when his sinews have been wrenched and dragged as mine have, he does not take kindly to the rack. You could have wrung my heart out of my body to-night with your hands, and it would not have hurt so much."

"I am so sorry!" Margaret breathed, warm gushes of pity sweeping over her. "You could never guess how sorry I am!"

"I suppose," he said more calmly, "that I have been a puzzle to you. You were too young to know me when I *lived.* I am only half alive now. Life has gone by and left me stranded. Look at that picture, child. That was Lydia—the Lydia of the best years of my life—the Lydia that I loved and won and married! Twelve years! How long ago it seems!"

Margaret had seated herself opposite him and leaned forward, her bare elbows on the table and

her locked fingers against her cheek. "I—understand now." Her voice was a strenuous whisper.

"You will know what that is some time—to feel one nearer than all the world—to tremble when her arm presses yours, to listen for the swish of her skirt, to turn hot and cold at the smell of her hair or the touch of her lips! She was beautiful—more beautiful to me than any woman I had ever seen, or ever shall see. She filled every corner of me! Life was complete. It had nothing left to give me. Can you think what that means? You know what happened then. It came crashing in upon my youth like a falling tower. Since then the years have gone by, but they stopped for me that day."

An intenser look was in Margaret's eyes. "But you have Lydia—you love her!"

He breathed sharply. "Have her!" he repeated. "I have her mind, her soul, the intellect that answered mine, the soul that leaned to my soul, but *her—her*—the body I held, the woman

I caressed, the fragrant life I touched—where is it? Where? I love her!" he cried with abrupt passion. "I loved her then; I love her now. I have never loved another woman! I never think a thought that is not of her. My very dreams, my imagination are hers! I would rather die than love another woman!

"I suppose people pity me and think how hard it was that Lydia's accident couldn't have happened before we were married instead of afterward. Fools! *Fools!* As though that would make it different! If it must have been, I wouldn't have it otherwise. Not to possess wholly the woman one loves is the cruelty of Love; the pain of knowing that no other love can possess you is the mercy of Love. Such misery is dearer than all other joys. She is *mine,* and with every breath that I curse Fate with I thank God for her!"

"Isn't that happiness?"

He laughed, a short, jarring, mirthless laugh that hurt her. "Do you think," he said, "that

that is all a man craves? Can a man—a living, breathing man—live on soul alone? Can you feed a starving human being on philosophy? His stomach cries for bread! You can quench his spiritual thirst while his heart dries up with physical drought. He wants both sides. With one unsatisfied, he goes halting, crippled. I live in my past and feed on the husks of it. Do you think they fill me? I tell you, I go always hungry—always famishing for what other men have!"

Margaret felt as if she were being wafted through some intangible inferno of suffering. She felt smothered, as by the dust of some dead thing into whose open grave she had unwittingly stumbled. The real Melwin that she had waked terrified her. The glimpse through the torn mask, into the distorted face, with its marks of branding, shook the depths of her nature. She had always thought of Melwin abstractly, as of a beautiful personality, crowned with spiritual stars and haloed with pain; now she saw him as

he was—a half-man, decrepit, moribund, his passion no living glow, but a flitting and unreal foxfire, which he must follow, follow, grasping at, but never gaining. The dreadful unfulfilment of his life's promise sat upon his brow and cried to her from every word and gesture. She felt as if she was gazing at some mysterious and but half-indicated problem to which there could be no answer.

That was a meal which Margaret never afterward remembered without a recoil. A chilling self-consciousness had fallen upon her and clogged her tongue. Melwin ate hastily and almost fiercely, saying nothing, and once half rising, it seemed in utter forgetfulness of her presence, and then sitting down again. She excused herself before the coffee and slipped away, running hastily up the stair to her room, her feet catching in the unaccustomed tightness of the old-fashioned skirt.

As she turned the key in the lock, she fancied

she heard a moan through the thick walls of Lydia's room, and she tore off the garments with feverish haste, shutting them from her sight in the carved Dutch chest which filled one corner, releasing, as she did so, a pungent odor of cedar; not the fresh, resinous smell of sappy forest-growth, but the dead-faint aroma of the past—the perfume that belonged to Lydia's gown, to Melwin, and to that gloomy house and all it contained.

She pushed open the heavy blinds and leaned across the window ledge, questioning. Melwin was a man—but Lydia? Had she also this inner buried side, which in him had been shocked into betrayal? Were men and women alike? Were their longings and cravings the same? Was there something in the one which felt and answered the every need of the other? Was spiritual attraction forever dependent for its completion upon physical love? The thought came to her that in the long years Melwin had become less himself; that his brooding mind had perhaps lost

its balance; that what to a healthier mind would be but a shadow had grown for him a threatening phantom. Her heart was full of a vague protest against the suggestion which had thrust itself upon her.

Her spiritual side reached out groping hands for comfort and sustenance.

Drawing down the window, she turned into the room. A ponderous Bible in huge blocked leathern covers lay on the low table, its antiquated silver clasps winking in the light from the pronged candlestick. With a sudden impulse, she threw it open, leaning forward, her fingers nervously ruffling its edges. This was the soul-comforter of the ages. It must help her.

"Hadad died also. And the dukes of Edom were; duke Timnah, duke Aliah, duke Jetheth,
"Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pimon."

The musty chronicle meant nothing. She turned again, parting the leaves near to the end.

"Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

"Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick."

She almost laughed at the banality of her haphazard choice. She knew the pages full of condemnation for the unworthy thought. Now they mocked her. Impatiently she opened the huge volume wide in the middle. A new and intense eagerness illumed her face as her eyes rested on the page:

"Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes.

"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

"My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

"His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.

"His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.* * *

"His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely."

She looked up startled, her breath struggling in her breast; a deep, vivid blush spread over her face and neck, glowing crimson against the whiteness of her apparel.

The room seemed suddenly dense with a dank, spicy smell of roses mixed with salty wind. It spread from the pages of the book and hung wreathing about her till the air was filled with fiery flowers. She felt herself burning hot, as if a flame were scorching her flesh. In the emptiness of the room, she caught her hands to her cheeks shamedly, lest the world could see that

tell-tale color. Even the dim candles' light angered her, and she blew them out, creeping into the soft bed hastily, as though into a hiding-place.

X.

For some days after her unforgettable meeting with Daunt in the woods, Margaret had not left the house. She had spent much of her time reading to Lydia. There was a never lessening sorrow in the invalid's gaze that affected her, full as was her mind of her own thoughts, and she had been glad to sit with her to escape the slow-burning fires that haunted her in Melwin's opaque eyes.

She had almost a fear to venture beyond the shelter of this cheerless home—a fear of what she longed for unspeakably and as unspeakably dreaded. She told herself that Daunt was gone, that he had returned to the city, that she would not see him again at Warne. And yet her inmost

wish belied the thought. He had gone away believing her cruel. The memory tortured her. An instinctive modesty, as innate as her conscience, had made it impossible for her to express in words the distinction which her own sensitiveness had drawn. To think of it was an intangible agony; to voice it was to penetrate the veiled sanctuary of her woman-soul.

But the afternoon following Melwin's outburst in the dining-room, her flagging spirits and the smell of the cropped fields drew her out of doors. She was sore with a sense of reproach at her own unthinking blunder. Since then she had not seen Melwin. She felt how awkward would be the next meeting.

The sunlight splintered against low-sailing clumps of vapor which extended to the horizon, and the chill of the air prompted her to walk briskly. She did not take the wood road, but kept to the open country, following the maple-lined footpath that boarded the rusting hedge-rows. There was little promise in the drooping,

despondent sky. A shiver of wind was in the tall grasses and a far whistling of a flock of marsh-birds came to her over the moist fallow.

A darting chipmunk made her turn her head, and she became conscious that a figure was close behind her. An intuitive knowledge flashed upon her that it was Daunt. A vibrant thrill shot through her limbs and she felt her cheeks heating.

"Margaret! Margaret!"

She turned her head where he stood uncovered behind her. His left wrist was bound tightly with a black band, and he carried his arm thrust between the buttons of his jacket.

"I am disabled for riding, you see," he said, smiling. "My wrist has gone lame on me. You see I am stopping at Tenbridge, and I walked over the hill."

The ease and naturalness of his opening disarmed her. She caught herself smiling back at him.

"I'm so sorry about your wrist," she said. "Does it pain you much?"

"Only when I forget and use it. Did you think I would come back again?" This with blunt directness.

She made him no answer.

"Do you know, I have been here every day since I saw you. I've spent the hours haunting the road through the woods and tramping these paths between the fields."

"I have not been out of the house since then," she answered.

"Why not?"

"Can't you guess why?"

"Were you afraid you might see me?"

"I—I didn't know."

"Look here, dear," he said, "you know I don't want to persecute you. If you will only tell me truly that you don't love me, I will go away at once and never see you again. But I believe that there is no other thing in life worth setting against love. It means my happiness and yours,

and it would be cowardly for me to give you up for anything but your happiness. Can't we reason a little about it?"

She shook her head hopelessly. "It wouldn't help. I have reasoned and reasoned, and it only makes me wretched."

His brows knit perplexedly. He stopped and faced her in the path. "Do you think that I have come to you for any other reason than that I want you, that you mean more to me now than you ever did? That I love you more—*more*—since I know you love me wholly? You have loved me, absolutely. Now you are refusing to marry me! Why? Why? Why?"

Margaret's flush had deepened. While he had been speaking, she had several times flung out her hand in mute protest. "Oh!" she said, "how can I make you understand? Love is strange and terrible. It isn't enough to love with the earth-side of us! Why"—her voice vibrated with a little tremor—"I would love you just the same if I knew you *had* no soul—if there was

only the human feel of you, and if I knew you must die like a dumb beast and not go to my heaven. If I knew that I should never see you again after this life, I would love you and long for you, just the same, now and afterward! Oh, there must be something wrong with my soul! That kind of a love is wrong. It's the love of the flesh! Don't you see? Can't you see it's wrong?"

Daunt struck savagely at the wiry beard-grasses with the stick he carried. This doubt was so irrational, so unwholesome to his healthy mind that to argue it filled him with a dumb anger. He groaned inwardly. She was impossible!

"You give no credit," he slowly said at last, "to your humanity. In a woman of your soul-sensitiveness, it is unthinkable that the one should exist without the other. Soul and sense react upon each other. Bodily love, in people who possess spirituality, who are not mere clods, dependent upon their eyes and appetites for all life gives them, presupposes spiritual affinity.

The physical may be the lesser side of us, but it is not necessarily the lower. Whatever there is in Nature is there because it ought to be. If we cannot see its beauty or its meaning, let us not blame Nature; let us blame ourselves."

"Don't think," said Margaret, "that I haven't thought all that! It is so easy to reason around to what we *want* to believe. It doesn't make me happy to think as I do, but I can't help it! We can't make ourselves *feel*. *I* can't! What good would it do me to make myself *think* I believed that? You would soon see what I lacked, and I would know it, and we would be chained to each other while our souls shrivelled. Oh," she ended with almost a sob, "I am so utterly miserable!"

Daunt felt a mad desire to take that near-by form in his arms, to soothe her and comfort her. He felt as if she were squeezing his heart small with her hands. He was silent. Then his resentful will rose in an ungovernable flood.

"Do you suppose I intend to break my life in

two for a quibble—for a baseless fancy? I tell you, you're wrong! You're wrong! You've tangled yourself up in a lot of sophistry! Don't think I am going to give up. I won't! You shall come to yourself! You shall! You *shall!*"

Margaret felt the leap of his will as an unbroken pacer the unexpected flick of a whip-thong. It was a new sensation. It had a tang of mastery, of domination, that was strange to her. She was unprepared for such a situation. She looked at him half stealthily. In the lines of his mouth there was an unfamiliar sovereignty. She felt that deliciousness of revolt which every strong woman feels at the first contact with an overbearing masculinity. A swift suggestion of the potentiality of his unyielding purpose stabbed her.

"And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." A flitting memory brought the parable to her mind. Could it be that the house of her defence was

built upon the sands? "And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew"—the first promise of the tempest was in his eyes. A fear of yielding insinuated itself darkly. The set intentness of his obstinacy lingered after his words, hung about her in the air and pressed upon her with the weight of an unescapable necessity. Her breath strained her.

All at once she turned, speaking rapidly, incoherently. "Don't—don't talk to me like that! Don't argue with me! I can't bear it—now! I'm all at sea; I'm a ship without a captain. Don't bend me; I was never made to be bent. I have got to think for myself. You must go away—indeed, you must! Somehow, to talk about it makes it so much worse. I can't discuss it! Don't ask me any more! Oh, I know you think I'm unreasonable. It sounds unreasonable sometimes, even to myself. I wish you wouldn't blame me, but I know you must. You can't help it. I blame myself, and I hurt myself, and the blame and the want and the hurt are all mixed up

together! If you care—if you care anything for me, you will go away! You won't come again. I hurt you when you do, and I can't bear to do it."

Daunt nodded, took her hand, held it a moment, and then released it. "Very well," he said quietly and sadly. He did not offer to kiss her. The fire had died out of his voice and there was left only a constrained sorrow. But it had no note of despair. Its resignation was just as wilful as had been its assertive passion. He looked at her a moment lingeringly, then turned and vaulting the hedge, with squared shoulders and swinging stride, struck off across the stubble of the fields.

Margaret did not look back, but she knew he had not turned his head. Then a long sigh escaped her.

XI.

Her blood coursed drummingly as she went back along the road, half running, her hat fallen, held by the loose ribbon under her chin, her hands opening and closing nervously. Her head was high and her mood struck through her like the smell of turned earth to a wild thing of the jungle. She wanted action, hard movement, and she ran with fingers spread to feel the breeze. Her thoughts were a tumult—her feelings one massing, striving storm of voices, through which ran constant, vibrating, a single, insistent, dominant chord.

"You *shall!* You SHALL!" she repeated under her breath. "Why do I like that? It's sweeter than bells! I can hear him say it yet. It was like a hand, pulling me!"

She stopped stock-still, suddenly, gazing at the fallen purple-and-crimson autumn leaves, a poured-out glory of color at her feet. "Splendid!" she said. She bent and swept up a great armful and tossed the clean, wispy, crackling things in the air. They fell in a whirling shower over her face, catching in her hair. In the midst of them she laughed aloud, every chord of her body sounding. Then, with a quick revulsion, she threw out her arms and sank panting on the selvage of the field.

"What can I do? What can I do?" she said. "I'm afraid! I can't go on fighting this way! It—drags me so." Her fingers were pulling up the tapery grass-spears in a sinister terror. "I felt so strong the last few weeks, and it's gone—utterly gone! Why—it went when I first looked at his face. If he had kissed me again, this time; if—if he had held me as he did that other day—in the woods—oh, my heart's water! There's something in me that *won't* fight. The ground goes from under my feet. It's dreadful

to feel this way! His hair smelled like—roses! If I had dared kiss it! I ought to be sorry and I'm—not! I'm ashamed to be glad, and I'm glad to be ashamed!"

She felt herself shivering, resentful of the ecstasy of sweetness that lapped and folded her. The dull glow of the sky irritated her with its very serenity.

"If I only hadn't seen him! If I had been strong enough not to! It's ungenerous of him. He ought to leave. He ought to have gone away after that last time! He *ought!*"

But if he had! The thought obtruded itself. She had longed for him to come; she knew, down in her soul, she had. Her heart had given her lips the lie. The woman in her had betrayed her conscience.

"It's the truth!" she cried, lifting her hand. "It's the truth! Oh, if he hadn't come—*if—he—hadn't!*" She muttered it to the wind by the loneliness of the slashed hedges. "That would have been the one last terrible thing. It would

have crushed me! I could never have been glad again. I'm sick now with desolation at the thought of it! It's easier not to be able to forgive myself than it would be not to be able to forgive him! But he *did* come! He wants me!" Her voice had a quiver of exultation. "Nothing on earth ever can rob me of that!—nothing!"

She pressed her arm against her eyes till her sight blent in golden-lettered flashes. The one presence was all about her; she could even feel his breath against her hair. His eyes had been the color of deep purple grapes under morning dew. The old hunger for him, for his hand, his voice, swept down upon her, and she crouched closer to the ground wet with fog-dew, striking the sod hard with her hands. He had come. He was there. He never would go—she knew that. If he stayed, she must yield. She had been perilously close to it that day.

After a time she became quieter and drew from her skirt pocket a crumpled letter, received that

morning after three re-forwardings. It was in a decisive feminine hand, and spreading it before her, Margaret turned several pages and began to read:

"Your letter has somehow distressed me," it read. "It seemed unlike your old self. It seemed sad. I imagine that you are troubled about something. Is it only that you are tired and dissatisfied? I have wondered much about you since you left the city in the spring. What have you been doing? How have you spent the time in the stale places of idleness? I have been so busy here at the hospital that I have seen none of our old friends. Time goes so quickly when you like your work! And I enjoy mine. It has come to mean a great deal to me. Dr. Goodno intends soon, he says, to put me in charge of the children's ward. Poor little things! They suffer so much more uncomplainingly than grown folks. Dr. Goodno is our superintendent and Mrs. Goodno is superintendent of nurses. She has been so dear and kind to me, one could not help loving her. It

hardly seems possible that I have been here three whole years.

"Margaret, have you ever thought seriously of the last letter I wrote you? There is a great deal of compensation in this life, and I have thought sometimes (I know you'll forgive me for saying it) that you needed some experience like this. Every woman ought to be the better for it. You are my dearest friend, and if I could only show you something—some new satisfaction in living—something to take you out of yourself more, I would be so glad.

"I have told Mrs. Goodno so much about you, and she would welcome you here, I know. It might be just what you need. You know the nurses are taken on three months' probation, and there is no compulsion to stay. If you did not like it, you could leave at any time, and you would be the gainer by the experience. You need no preparation. Just telegraph me at any time and come."

A resolution had formed itself rapidly in Mar-

garet's mind. Thrusting the letter deep into her pocket, she walked swiftly up the path to the house. She sent Creed with a telegram before she entered the library. Melwin was standing with his back to her, staring out through the leaded diamonds of the window. He turned slowly, gazing over her shoulder. His face had lapsed into its habitual neutral passiveness. His pupils had contracted into their peculiar unrefracting dulness, and his hands hung without motion.

"Melwin," she said, "I'm going back to the city. I have received a letter which makes it necessary. I think I will take the evening train."

He turned again to the window. "Must you—go?" His voice was toneless and dull.

"Yes," she answered. "I will look in and say good-by to Lydia." She waited a moment uncertainly, but he did not speak, and she left him standing there.

Turning the knob of Lydia's door softly, she

pushed it open and entered. Lydia lay with her face turned toward the wall; her regular breathing showed that she slept. Margaret could not bear to awaken her. A wavering smile was on her parted lips and gave a fragile loveliness to the delicate transparency of her skin. Perhaps a happy dream had come for awhile to beckon her from ever-present pain. Perhaps she was dreaming that she was well and knew and filled a strong man's yearning.

Margaret closed the door noiselessly. Going to her room, she pencilled a little note, and tiptoeing cautiously back through the hall, slipped the missive under Lydia's door.

And this was her farewell.

XII.

Across the country Daunt strode, paying little heed to his direction. He skirted one field, crossed another, swung through a gully, scrambled along a gravel-pit, climbed a hilly slope, and cut across in a wide circuit. He thought that physical weariness might bring mental relief. He paused for a moment by the edge of a clayey bank, in which a multitude of tiny sand-swallows—winged cliff-dwellers—had pecked them vaulted homes. He thrust his stick gently into one of the openings and smiled to see the bridling anger of its feathered inhabitant.

Seating himself upon a pile of split rails in a fence corner, he dropped into reverie. He was conscious of an immense depression. The past few weeks had brought him nearer to realizing

how much Margaret meant, not only to himself, but to his labor in the world, than he had ever been before. His artistic temperament had pointed him a dreamer, but his natural earnestness had made him a laborious one. His ideals were fresh and strong, and the world of tangled interests and woven ambitions had stood before him always, mute, importunate, a place to make them real. In man's ear there sound ever three voices: the brazen-throated throng, the silver-throated few and the golden-throated one. This last voice Daunt had learned to listen to. He had made Margaret his unconscious motive. The best of his written work had been done at the huge antique mahogany desk under her picture. What she had been to his work, what she was then, showed him what her presence or absence in his life must inevitably mean. He realized the truth of what he had once scoffed at, that behind every man's success lies the heart of a woman.

He felt a profound disheartenment. His mind skimmed the waste of his younger years. It saw

his toils as little things and the work he had praised in himself as that of a trifler. He knew now his capacities for ambition. He saw inspiration for the first time as, on a twilit highway, one sees a fancied bush, with a sudden movement, resolve itself into a human figure. He saw his past, harvestless. Fate had taken his youth, like a handful of sand, and fed it to the sea! Since Margaret had gone, his work had been purposeless, barren—it wanted her presence.

He had lighted his pipe mechanically, and through the blue-pale smoke whorls, a near bush took on the outline of her clear profile, reclined against a dusky cushion. His longing filled the silence with an inward voice:

"You are the woman," it said, "that I have always wanted! I want you all! I want your childish shallows and your womanly deeps! I want your weakness and your strength! I want you just as you are, no different—you, yourself."

She was sitting before him now in the firelight

of her room, where the tongues of the burning drift-wood and salt-dusted larch sprang up, blue, magenta and purplish-green, prickling the brass-work of the fireplace into a thousand many-colored points, and he was leaning forward, speaking, with his bare heart behind set lips: "I love you. All that I have for you that you will not own! All that you might be to me that you will not give!"

He felt her present trouble vaguely and with the same impotent resentment that he had felt in that far-off yet ridiculously near child-life, when in all the lofty manhood of his eight years he had defied the cliff-winds—that childhood which lived in his memory as a stretch of sun-drowned sea-beach swept by wind; a dim background in a frame of sharp outline, which held little images of delicate fragrance, clear and sweet, on the retina of his memory. This woman met him in a pain, measured by his added years, that he was powerless to appease.

Knocking the cold ashes from his pipe, Daunt

rose and stretched his arms wide along the topmost rail of the shambling fence and gazed out across the evening hills, blurred by the blue of distance, into the red sunset. Far to the left, glooming from encircling elms, lay the house that sheltered Margaret. Down below him, in the railroad cut, crawled a deliberate tank-train. From where he stood, he could see the ungainly arm of the slung pipe, through which the thirsty engine drank deep draughts. Sitting in the chill air had told him his fatigue, and his wrist had grown stiff and painful. He felt unequal to the long walk across to Tenbridge, and, consulting his watch, reflected that the city-bound train, almost due, would carry him to the little Guthrie junction, shortening his walk by half.

He pushed rapidly down the hill road, grateful for the heat of renewed motion. The station was deserted. One shabby hack drowsed driverless under the shed, and even the ticket agent had apparently forsaken his grating.

Sauntering across the platform, Daunt leaned

against the signal-post, on whose swinging arm a round, fevered eye watched, unwinkingly and angry, for the distant train, fast growing from a bright pin point to a blazing blotch of yellow, between the spun-out rails. Its attenuated rumbling had swelled to a trembling roar. His preoccupation was so deep that the clamorous iron thing was upon him almost before he heard it. The surprise jarred him into sudden movement, and it was then that his tired limbs lurched under him; the sucking vortex of the hurtling mass threw him off his balance, he wavered, stumbled, fell—and the pitiless armored monster, plunging, gigantic, regardless, caught him on its mailed side and passed on, to shudder, to slow, to stop—too late!

XIII.

The gas lamps had been early lit and threw flaring streaks of white across the dingy platform as Margaret reached the station. She had stood on the top of the little slope, looking back across the fields, grown dim and mysterious in the purpling dusk, with a tightening of the throat. However unhappy she had been here, yet she had seen Daunt. He had stood with her by those dwarfed hedges, he had pleaded with her under the flaming boughs of those woods. She could still feel the strong pressure of his lips upon her hand as he besought her for what she could have given him so eagerly, so gladly, so joyously if she had dared. She was leaving him there, and the parting now seemed so much more than that other seaside flight, when she had been stung to

action by her own self-reproach. Making her mute farewell, she heard a shriek of steam, as the train came shuddering into the station, drawing long, labored breaths like some chained serpent monster, overtired, and she hastened stumblingly, uncertainly over the stony road. When she reached the platform, she was out of breath and panting, and did not notice the knot of trainmen, with beckoning arms and dangling lanterns, by the side of the track.

She sank into her Pullman seat wearily. Several windows were open and inquiring heads were thrust forth. She was conscious of a subdued excitement in the air. A conductor passed hurriedly through the coach and swung himself deftly off the end. People about her asked each other impatiently why the train did not start, and a sallow-faced woman with a false front hoped nervously and audibly that nothing was the matter. A sudden whisper spread itself from chair to chair, and a man came back from the smoking

compartment to seat himself beside his wife, and pulled down the window-shade with low whisperings.

"An accident. A man hurt."

Margaret heard it with a tremor. She tried to raise her window, but the latch caught, and she placed her face close to the pane to peer out. Up the platform tramped four trainmen, bloused and grimy with coal-dust, carrying between them a board, covered with tarpaulin, under which showed clearly the outlines of a human figure.

Margaret caught her breath and drew back with a sudden feeling of faintness. There were a few tense moments of waiting. Then a quiver ran through the heavy trucks, there was a sharp whistle, a snort of escaping steam, and past her window moved slowly back the station lamps. A porter went toward the baggage-car, his arms piled high with white towels, which threw his ebony face into sharp contrast. The forward conductor leaned over the occupant of the chair

across from Margaret to borrow his flask, and went out with it. She realized from this that the injured one was on the train.

He was probably at that moment lying on the floor of the baggage-car, amid a litter of trunks and bags. Men were bending over him to see if he lived or died. Five minutes ago he had been as full of life and strength and breath as she. Now he lay stricken and maimed and ghastly, a huddle of bleeding flesh and torn sinew, perhaps never again to see the smile of the sunlight, or, perhaps, to live mutilated and broken and disfigured, his every breath a pain, his every pulse a pang. Perhaps he had loved ones—a *one* loved one, who had hung about his neck and kissed him when he went away. What of that love when they should bring this object back to her?

A hideous question of the lastingness of human love flung itself from the darkness without in upon her brain. One could love when the face was fair, when the form was supple and straight, when the eyes were clear and the blood was young

with the flush of life! One could still love when age had grayed the hair and the kindly years had bowed the back. Mutual love need not dim with time, but only mellow into the peaceful content of fruition.

But let that straight form be struck down in its prime: a misstep, a slip in the crowded street, a broken rail, an explosion in a chemist's shop, and in an instant the beauty is scarred, the symmetrical limb is twisted, the tender face is seamed and gnarled. The loved form has gone, and in its place is left a shape of pain, of repulsion, of undelight. Ah! what of that love then?

Margaret shivered as if with cold. How could *she* answer that? There was a love that did not live and die in the beating of the heart, which did not fade into darkness when its outer shell perished. That was the spirit love. That was the love of the mother for the child, of the soul for the kindred soul. That was the love that endured. It was the only love which justified itself. It was this that God intended when He put man

and woman in the earth to cherish one another and gave them living souls which spoke a common language. Better a million times crush from the heart any lesser habitant! Better an empty soul, swept and garnished, than a chamber of banqueting for a fleshly guest!

Woman's heart is the Great Questioner. When Doubt waves it from natural interrogation of the world about it, it turns with fearful and inevitable questionings upon itself, until the sky which had been thronged with quiring seraphim flocks thick with sneering devils. "Do you think," insinuates the Tempter mockingly, "that this beautiful dove-eyed love of yours can stand the ultimate test? Have you tried it? You have seen loves just as beautiful, just as young, go down into the pit. Do you dream that yours can endure? Strip from your love the subtle magnetism of the body, take from it the hand-touch, the lip-caress, the pride of the eye, and what have you left? The hand grows palsied, the lips shrivel, the eye lead-

ens, and love's body dies. What then? Ah, what then!

The darkness had fallen more thickly without, and Margaret saw her face reflected from the window-pane, as in a tarnished and trembling mirror. Her own eyes gazed back at her. She put up her hands and rubbed them against the glass, as though to erase the image she saw.

"Don't look so," she said, half aloud. "What right have you to look so good? Don't you know that if you had staid, if you had seen him again, you would have thought as he did? You couldn't have helped it! You couldn't! You had to run away! You didn't want to come! You wish you were back again now! You—you do! You want him. You want him just as you did—then! That's the worst of it."

The face in the glass made her no answer. It angered her that those eyes would offer no glance of self-defence, and, with a quick impulse, she reached up and drew down the shade.

The whir and click of the flying wheels jarred through her brain. She had a sense of estrangement from herself. She felt almost as though she were two persons. The one Margaret riding in her pillowed chair, with her mind a turmoil of evil doubts, and the other Margaret rushing on by her side through the outer night, calm-eyed and untroubled, and these two almost touching and yet separated by an infinite distance. They could never clasp each other again. She had a vague feeling that there was a deeper purpose of punishment in this. She herself had raised the ghost which must haunt her.

She hardly noted the various stations as the train stopped and breathed a moment, and then dashed on. Try as she would, her thoughts recurred to the baggage-car and the burden it carried. She wondered whether they would put it off quickly at the terminal, and what it would look like. It was for such things that hospitals were built, and to a hospital with all that it implied, she was bound. New and torturing doubts of her

own strength beset her. She was afraid. In her imagination she already smelled the sickening sweet halitus of iodoform and saw white-aproned nurses winding endless bandages upon bleeding gashes that would not be stanched.

An engulfing rumbling told her that they were entering the city tunnel, and nearby passengers began a deliberate assortment of wraps and parcels. The porter passed through the train, loudly announcing the last stop. There was almost a relief to Margaret's overwrought sensibilities in his sophisticated utterance. It was a part of the great cube-jumbled, fish-ribbed metropolis, with its clanging noises and its swirl of cañoned living for which during the past weeks she had thirsted feverishly. She felt, without putting it into actual mental expression, that surcharged thought might find relief in simple things.

Lois would be waiting there to meet her. She would be glad to see her. It was pleasant to be loved and looked for. A moment or two more and the white, smoky haze that blotted the car

windows lifted, and in place of the milky opaque squares appeared glimpses of wide-lit spaces and springing ironwork. The car hesitated, shocked itself with a succession of gentle jars, and came heavily to a halt. They were in the station.

Margaret alighted on the platform with limbs numb and tired. The strain of the day had given her a yearning for quiet, for the abandon of a deep chair with soft cushions, and a cup of tea. She met Lois with outstretched arms and a wan and uncertain smile against which her lips feebly protested.

"Why, Margaret, dear, how tired you look!" said Lois, kissing her. "Come, and we'll get a cab just outside. Your train was very late. I thought you never *would* get here at all!"

Margaret clung to Lois's hands. "O—h," she said, falteringly, "do we have to go up the whole length of the train?"

"Why, yes; are you so very tired?"

"No—but——" she stopped, ashamed of her weakness. She was coming to be a nurse—to

learn to care for sick people and to dress wounds. What would Lois think of her? "Do—do they unload the baggage-car now?"

"Oh," said Lois, cheerfully, "we'll leave your checks here; it won't be necessary to wait for the trunks. Come, dear!" She led the way up the thronged platform. "Hurry!" she said suddenly, "there is a case in the baggage-car. I wonder where it's going! Oh, you poor darling!"

Margaret had turned very pale and leaned against a waiting truck for support.

"I forgot. That *is* a rather stiff beginning for you, isn't it? I'm *so* sorry! I hope you didn't see; it looks like a bad one. Don't watch it, dear. That's right! You won't mind it a bit after a while. You're quite worn out now. Come, we'll go around this other way."

"It happened at Warne," said Margaret, tremulously. "I saw them take him on."

"Poor dear! and you must have been worrying about it all the way in. Do you see the ambulance at the curb? That's ours. You see, they

telegraphed, and now he will be cared for sooner than you get your tea. There goes the ambulance gong! They're off. And now here's the cab."

XIV.

An hour later, Margaret, somewhat composed from her ride, waited in the homelike bedroom for Lois to come and take her to Mrs. Goodno, the Superintendent of Nurses. From her post at the window she could look down upon the street.

It had begun to rain, and the electric lights hurled misshapen Swedish-yellow splotches on the wet asphalt. The wind had risen, rending the clouds into shaggy lines and made a dreary, disconsolate singing in the web of telephone wires bracketed beneath the window. Margaret felt herself to be in a state of unnatural tension. She gazed out into the swathing darkness, trying desperately to make out the landscape. Her eyes wandered from the clumps of wet and glistening foliage to

the starting lights in a far-off apartment house, which thrust its massive top, fortress-like, and, with proportions exaggerated by the lowering scud, up into the air. Do what she would, her mind recurred, as though from some baleful necessity, to the details of the long train-ride. The never-ending clack of the wheels was in her ears. She clenched her hands as the landscape resolved itself into the dim station at Warne, and she saw again the grimy brakemen carrying something by covered with a dirty canvas.

She shut her eyes to drag them away from the window. How could she ever stand it! It had been a mistake—a horrible, ghastly mistake! She had turned cold and sick when they had carried it past the car window. How could she ever bear to see things like that? Lois did. Lois liked it! So did all of them. But they were different. There must be something hideously wrong about her—it was part of her unwomanliness—part of her guilty lack. The others saw the quivering soul beneath the sick flesh; she could never see

within the bodily tenement. She was handcuffed to her lower side. She remembered the story of the criminal, chained by wrist and ankle to a comrade; how he woke one day to find the other dead—*dead*—and himself condemned to drag about with him, day and night, that horrible, inert thing. She, Margaret Langdon, was like this man. She must drag through life this corpse of a dead spirituality, this finer comrade soul of hers which had somehow died! Her life must be one long hypocrisy—one unending deceit. She was even there under false pretences. They would not want her if they knew.

She turned toward the fireplace. Over it hung a sepia print of the Madonna of the Garden. The glow touched the rounded chin and chubby knees of the little St. John with a soft flesh-tint, and left in shadow the quaint incongruity of the distant church-spire. Margaret's whole spirit yearned toward its placid purity. She had had the same print hung in her bedroom at home, and it had looked down upon her when she prayed.

She gazed at it now with eyes of wretchedness, filmed with tears. Her throat ached acutely with a repressed desire to sob. She fancied that the downcast lids lifted and that the luminous, wide eyes followed her wonderingly, reproachfully.

Lois came in smiling. "She is in now," she said, "and we will go down."

Margaret exerted herself and tried to chat bravely as they went along the corridor, and entered the cool silence of the room where Lois's friend waited to meet her. There was a restfulness in Mrs. Goodno's neat attire, and a dignity about her clear profile, full, womanly throat and strong, capable wrists, that seemed to be an inseparable part of her atmosphere. Her firm and unringed hands held Margaret's with a suggestion of tried strength and assured poise that bore comfort. Her eyes were deep gray, smiling less with humor, one felt, than with a constant inward reflection of welcome thoughts. Her hair was a dull, toneless black, carried back under her

lace cap in a single straight sweep that left the hollows of her neck in deep shadow.

"And you are Miss Langdon?" she said. "Lois has told me so much about you. Do sit down. Tea will be here directly, and I want to give you some, for I know you have had a long, dreary ride."

She busied herself renewing the grate fire, while Margaret watched her with straying eyes.

"You know," she said, returning, "we people who spend our lives taking care of broken human bodies have to be strong ourselves. You are strong; I see that, though your face has tired lines in it now. But we must be more than that —our minds must be healthy. We can't afford to be morbid. We have to have cheerful hearts. We must see the beauty of the great pattern that depends on these soiled and tangled threads we keep straightening out here."

"Oh," said Margaret, "do you think we have to be happy to do any good in the world? How can we be happy unless we work? And if we start

miserable——" she stopped, with an acute sense of wretchedness.

"No, not happy necessarily. There are things in some of our lives which make that impossible; but we can be cheerful. Cheerfulness depends not on our past acts, but on our wholesome view of life, and we get this by learning to understand it and to understand ourselves."

"But, do you think," questioned Margaret, "do you think we always do in the end?"

"Yes; I believe we do. It's unfailing. I proved it to myself, for I began life by being a very unnatural girl, and a very unhappy one. I misunderstood my own emotions, as all young girls do. I didn't know how to treat myself. I didn't even know I was sick. I had been brought up in New England, and I tortured myself with religion. It wasn't the wickedness of the world that troubled me; I expected too much of myself —we all do at a certain age. And, because I found weakness where I hadn't suspected it, I thought I was all wrong. You know we New

Englanders have a peculiar aptitude for self-torture, and I wore my hair-cloth shirt and pressed it down on the sores. It was the University Settlement idea that first drew me out of myself. I went into that and worked at first only for my own sake; but, after a while, for the work's sake. It was only work I wanted, my dear, and contact with real things. Out of the turmoil and mixture and pain I got my first real satisfaction. In its misery and want and degradation I learned that an isolated grief is always selfish. I learned the part that our human bodies play in life. I began to see a meaning in the plan and to understand the part in it of what I had thought the lower things in us. Then I got into the hospital work, and you will soon see what that is. It has shown me humanity. It has taught me the nobility of the human side of us. It makes me broader to understand and quicker to feel; and it isn't depressing. There is a great deal in it that is sunny. I hope you will like it. But we are not all made in the same mould, and we regard your

coming, of course, merely as an experiment. So, if you feel at any time that it is not for you, come to me and tell me. Come to me any time and talk with me.

"Now you have finished your tea, and I must go to the children's ward. I have put you with Lois till the strangeness of it wears off, and you can have a separate room whenever you like."

Leaning forward, she brushed Margaret's cheek lightly with her lips and went quickly out of the room.

In spite of her misery, a shy feeling of comfort had come into Margaret's heart. She rose and surveyed herself in the mirror over the mantel, drawing a deep breath and raising her shoulders as she did so. It was an unconscious trick of hers.

"Oh, no!" she said half aloud, "that is the temptation. I want to think it, and it can't be true. I *want* to! The want in me is bad! How *can* it be true?" "The nobility of the human side of us"—ah, that had come from the calm poise of

a wholesome understanding! It was noble—this human side—but not king. What of this strange mastery that overflowed her, the actual ache for the glow of his eyes, the pressure of his fingers? The mere memory of it was like a live coal to her cheeks. It burned her. The feel of his strong hair was in the fibrous touch of her gown. His mouth, smiling at the corners, warmed her shoulder. His bodily presence was all about her; it breathed upon her, and her soul reeled and shut its eyes like a drunken man!

Margaret tossed her hands above her head, the wrists dropping crosswise upon the shearing pillow of her flame-washed hair. In the mirror she saw the pale oval of her face in this living setting. As she gazed, the features warmed and changed; the eyes became Daunt's eyes—the mouth, Daunt's mouth. It was Daunt's face, as she had looked up into it framed in her arms on the sun-brilliant beach. The wind was all about her, fresh and odorous, and his kisses were falling upon her seasalt lips!

Still holding her arms raised, she leaned to the mirror and kissed the glass hungrily. Her breath sighed the picture dim. The magic of it was gone, and Margaret, glancing fearfully behind her, turned and ran breathless to her room, where she locked the door and threw herself upon the bed, pressing her face down into the soft pillow gaspingly, to shut out the vivid passion-laden odor of bruised roses that seemed to pursue her, filling all her senses like a far-faint smell of musk.

XV.

Margaret passed along through the light-freshened ward, following Lois closely, and fighting desperately the active feeling of nausea which almost overcame her. All her sensitive nature cringed in this atmosphere. Through the brightness and cleanliness of wood and metal, the absolute whiteness of the stamped bed-linen and the fresh smell of antiseptics, she had a morbid sense of the ugliness of disease, of the loathsomeness of contact with physical decrepitude that is one of the selfishnesses of the artistic temperament. She felt the dread, incubus-like, pressing upon her and sucking from her what force and vitality she had. A feeling of despair of being able to cope with this thrusting melancholy beset her and she fought it off with her strongest strength.

At intervals, as they passed, was a cot shut off by screens of white linen, fluted and ironed, as high as the eyes. These spotless blanks stood out more awful to Margaret in intimation of hidden horror than any open physical convulsion. Behind these screens was more often silence, but sometimes came forth an indistinct and restless muttering, and once a sharp, panging groan. A sick apprehension gripped her, and she felt her palms growing moist with sweat. She was sickly sensible of the sweet, pungent smell of carbolic and ether, sharpened by a spicy odor of balsam-of-Peru. From the pillows curious eyes peered at her, set in faces sharp-featured and hectic, or a shambling figure in loose garments moved, bent and halting, across their path. She caught a sidewise view, through a swing door, of a tiled operating-room, with a glittering *mêlée* of polished instruments. Here and there she thought the lapping folds of bandages moved, showing blue glimpses of gaping cuts and festering tissue.

It seemed as if the long rows of white coverlids and iron bed-bars would go on eternally.

As they came to the extreme end of the room, Margaret suddenly stopped, gripping Lois's arm with vise-close fingers. "What is that?" she whispered.

"What is what?"

She stood listening, her neck bent sideways, and a flush of excitement rising on her cheeks. "Didn't you hear him call me?" she said.

"Hear him? Hear who?" said Lois.

But she did not answer. "Take me away; oh, take me away!" she said weakly. "I want to go back to the room. I—I can't tell you what I thought I heard. It would sound such nonsense. I must have imagined it. Oh, of course I imagined it! Oh, Lois, I don't believe I will ever be any good here, do you?"

Lois drew her into the outside corridor and up the hall. "I do believe you are sick yourself!" she said. "Why, you have quite a fever. There

is something troubling you, dear, I'm sure. Can't you tell me about it?"

"Oh, no! Indeed there is nothing!" cried Margaret. "Lois, I want to see *all* the patients—the worst ones. Promise me you'll take me with you when you go around to-night. Indeed, indeed, I must! You *must let* me! I will be just as quiet! You will see! You think it wouldn't be best—that I'm too fanciful and sensitive yet—but indeed, it isn't that. Maybe it's because I only look on from a distance. I don't touch it, actually. I'm only a spectator. If I could go quite close, or do something to help with my hands, maybe they would seem more like people, and the sickness of it would leave me. Do, dear, say I may to-night!"

They had reached the room now, and Lois gently forced Margaret upon the lounge. "Very well," she said, "I will. I'm going through at nine o'clock. I'm not afraid of your sensitiveness. It's the sensitive ones who make the best nurses,

Dr. Goodno says. They can *feel* their diagnosis. But you must lie down till I can come for you."

Left alone, Margaret pressed her head into the cushions and tried to think. She could not shake off the real impression of that cry. "Ardee! Ardee!" It had come to her with such suddenness that every nerve had jumped and jerked. Could she have dreamed it? Was the sound of that old intimate name of hers, breathed in that peculiar voice, only a trick of the imagination? Surely it must have been! Her nerves were overwrought and frayed. She was hysterical. It was only the muttering of some fever patient! And yet, she had felt that she must see. An indefinable impulse had urged her to beg Lois to take her with her. And now the same horror would seize her again, the same sickening repulsion, and she would have the same fight over.

When Lois came for her, Margaret prepared herself quickly and they passed down. At the

door of the surgical ward they met the house surgeon, who nodded to Margaret at Lois's introduction. "Just going in to see Faulkner's trephine case," he said. "It's a funny sort."

"Is he coming through all right?" asked Lois. "That's the one that was brought in on your train the other night, Margaret," she added.

"I'm afraid it's going to be the very devil. He took a nasty temperature this afternoon, and the nurse got worried and called me up. I found we had a good old-fashioned case of sepsis—wound full of pus and all that. What makes it bad is that he has hemiplegia. The whole left side seems to be paralyzed. The operation didn't relieve the brain pressure, and with his temperature where it is now, we'll have to simply take care of that and let any further examination go. I've just telephoned to Faulkner. It won't be a satisfactory case, anyway. There is possibly some deeper brain injury in the motor area, and if we beat the poison out, he stands to turn out a helpless cripple. Some people are never satisfied,"

he continued, irritably. "When they start out to break themselves up, they have to do it in some confounded combination that's the very devil to patch up. Coming in?"

He held the door open, and they followed him quickly to a nest of screens at the upper end of the ward, passing in with him.

Margaret forced her unwilling eyes to regard the patient as the doctor laid a finger upon his pulse, attentively examined the temperature chart, and departed. He lay with his left side toward them. The head was partly shaven, hideous with bandages, and in an ice-pack. The side-face was drawn, distorted and expressionless. His left hand lay quiet, but the fingers of the right picked and tumbled and drummed on the coverlid unceasingly. He was muttering to himself in peculiar, excitable monotone. On a sudden his voice rose to audible pitch:

"Now, then! you'll come. Don't say you won't! Why—you can't help it! You *will!* Do you hear? * * * * Take the straight pike to the

crossroads, and then two miles further on. The Drennen place—yes, I know!"

At the tone Margaret started in uncontrollable excitement. An inarticulate cry broke from her. She ran to the foot of the bed, and, her fingers straining on the bars, gazed with fearful questioning into the features of the sick man. As she gazed, his head rolled feebly on the pillow, displaying the right side of the face. Then a low, terrible, choking, sobbing cry rose to her lips—a cry of pain, of remonstrance, of desolation. "Why, it's—it's my—my—it's Richard Daunt!"

Lois reached her in a single step and held her, trembling. But after that one bitter sob she was absolutely silent. She hardly breathed; all her soul seemed to be looking out of her deep eyes. The uncouth mumbling went on, uncertain but incessant.

"* * Drennen place. That's where she is. I'll find her! Let me go! Quick, take this off my head! I tell you, I've *got* to go! * * * Oh, my dear, don't you want to see me? You look like

an autumn leaf in that scarlet cloak. Come closer to me. Your hair is like flame and you're pale—pale—pale! Look at me! * * * How dare you treat me this way? How dare you! You knew I'd come to you—you knew I couldn't help it. Some one told me you didn't want me to come. * * * It was a letter, wasn't it? Some one wrote me a letter. But it was a lie!"

Lois readjusted the ice-pack, and the voice died down into broken mutterings. Then he began again:

"Where's Richard Daunt? You've got to make her understand! You've got to, and you can't. You've failed. She used to love you, and now she's gone away and left you. She won't come back! You can go to the devil! * * * Ardee! See how your hair shines against the old cross! Pray for her soul! Pray—for—her—soul! * * Ardee!"

Margaret bowed her face on her hands, still clasping the bed-rail. Great, clear tears welled up in her eyes and splashed upon the coverlid.

She saw, as if through a fleering maze of windy rain-sheets, the dull, round, staring eyes, the yellow skin, the restless fingers and unlovely lips. Then she stood upright, swaying back and putting both hands to her temples as though something tense had snapped in her brain.

A pained wonder was in the look she turned on Lois—something the look of a furred wood-animal caught by the thudding twinge of a bullet. The next moment she threw herself softly on her knees by the cot, stretching her arms across the straightened figure, pressing her lips to the rounded outline of the knees, and between these kisses, lifting her face, swollen with sobless crying, to gaze at the rolling, unrecognizing features beside her. Agony was in the puffed hollows beneath her eyes, and her lips were drawn with the terrible yearning of a mother for her ailing child.

Lois raised her forcefully, yet feeling a strange powerlessness, and drew her away, with a finger on her lip and a warning glance beyond the

screens, and Margaret followed her with the tranced gaze of a sleep-walker. There was no repugnance or distrust in it now, or fleshly horror of sickness.

In her room again, she stood before the window, her mind reaching out for the new sweetness that had dropped around her. All that she had thought strongest in her old love had shrunk to pitiful detail. Between her young, lithe body and the broken and ravaged wreck she had seen, there could then be no bond of bounding blood and throbbing flesh; but love, masterful, undismayed, had cried for its own. Something was dissolving within her heart—something breaking down and away of its own weight. She felt the fight finished. It had not been fought out, but the combatants who had gripped throat in the darkness had started back in the new dawn, to behold themselves brothers. There was a primal directness in the blow that had thrust her back—somewhere—back from all self-question-

ings and the torture of mental misunderstanding, upon herself. It was an appeal to Cæsar. Beneath the decree, the rigidity of belief that had lain back of her determination turned suddenly flexible. She did not try to reason—she felt. But this feeling was ultimate, final. She knew that she could never doubt herself again.

The green glints from the grass-plots on the tree-lined street and the sun on the gray asphalt filled her with a warm tenderness. Every bird in all the world was piping full-throated; every spray on every bush was hung with lush blossoms and drenched with fragrance. The swell of filling lungs and tumultuous blood—the ecstasy of breathing had returned to her. The joy-bitter gladness of the heart and the world, the enfolding arms of the unforgot, clasped her round. It was for her the Soul's renaissance. The Great Illumination had come!

As Lois gazed at her, mystified, she turned, with both hands pressed against her breast, and laughed.

XVI.

Closing the door, Margaret opened her trunk and from the very bottom produced a slender bunch of letters. She lit the small metal lamp and placed it on the wicker chair, kneeling beside it with an unreasoning sense that there was a fitness in the posture. Her fingers trembled as she touched the black ribbon which held the letters, and she stayed herself, swaying against a chair, as she unknotted it. There were a few folded sheets of paper—pencilled notes left for her—a telegram or two, and four letters. Before she read the first letter, she laid it against her face, lovingly, as though it were a sentient thing. She read them one by one very slowly, sometimes smiling faintly with a childish trembling of the lips—smiles that were followed quickly by

tears which gathered in her great eyes and rolled down her cheeks. When she had finished reading the last one, she made a little pile of them. Then, taking from her trunk writing paper, ink and pen, she laid them upon the floor beside the pile of letters and stretched herself full length upon the heavy rug. As she lay leaning upon her elbows, with eyes gazing straight before her, she looked like some desolate, wind-broken reed over which the storm had passed. She wrote slowly, with careful fingers, forming her letters with almost laborious precision, like a little child who writes for a special and fond eye:

"My Beloved: Please forgive me. Please try to forget how cruel I was and think kindly of me. I have been so wretched. All through the slow days since I went away, I have longed so for you. All the many dark nights I have dreamed of you and cried for you. If you could only know now while you are suffering so. If you could only know how I longed for you all that time, I would

not suffer so now. I want so much to tell you. I want to tell you that I love you every way and all ways. I loved you this way all the time, only I didn't know it, and I wanted to love you the way I know I do now. I must have been mad, I think. I was so selfish and so cruel, and I thought I was trying to be so good. I could die when I think that it was I who brought all this suffering upon you. To think that you might have been killed and that I might never have been able to tell you! Richard, I have learned what love is. Do other women ever have to learn it as hardly, I wonder?

"Do you know, it was not until to-day that I knew you were here—that you were hurt? And yet we came here on the same train together. If God had let me know it then, I think I should have died on that long, terrible journey. You did not know what you were saying, and I heard you call 'Ardee! Ardee!' just as you used to at the beach. That cry reached out of the dark and

took hold of my heart as though it were an invisible hand drawing me to you.

"And I had been running away from you when I came—running away from you and myself. I knew you meant to stay at Warne and see me again. And I knew if I saw you again, I could not struggle any longer—you were so strong. And you were right, too; I know that now, dear.

"The last time I met you in the field, my heart leaped to tell you 'yes.' I was so hungry—hungry—hungry for you. And I was afraid of my own self. I distrusted my own heart, but it was only because I wanted to love you with my soul—with the other side of me—the side that I did not know, that I could not feel sure you filled. Oh, you must have thought me unnatural, abnormal, hateful. Dear, such doubts come to women, and they are terrible things. There is more of the elemental in men. The finer—the further passion of love they know, when women fail to grasp it. We have to learn it—it is one of the

lessons which men teach us. When my heart was so full of doubt, I made up my mind to crucify my bodily sensibilities. It seemed to me that I must let my soul come uppermost.

"Don't you remember how I never could bear to look at your collie that was sick, and how terribly ill I got when I tried to tie up your hand the day you cut it? All through my life, I have never been able to look on suffering or pain. I always used to avoid it or shirk it. When I got to thinking, at Warne, of my own soul, it seemed to me that I had been unwomanly and selfish, cruelly, heartlessly selfish, and that I had dwarfed that soul that I must make grow again.

"So I came down here.

"All along I have had such a horror of this place. I could not overcome it. Every hour was full of misery.

"To-day I went through the wards and I found you.

"Dearest, I am so happy and I am so miserable—miserable because I have found you suffer-

ing. Every moment is a long agony to me. And happy because I have found myself. My soul and I are friends again. Some wonderful miracle was worked for me to-day, and it is so brilliant, so wonderful, that it has left no room in my mind for anything else.

"It was not the old familiar face that I saw against the pillows to-night. It was not the old dear voice that called to me. It was not the old Daunt. The wavy hair is gone, and there is no color in your cheeks. But, dear, when I saw your poor face all drawn and your lips all cracked with fever, my heart came up in my throat so that I could not breathe. I wanted to kiss your face, your hands. I wanted to kiss even the bandages that were around your head. I wanted to put my arms around you. I felt strong enough to keep anything from you—even death. All in a moment it seemed to me that I was your mother, and you were my little child who was sick. And yet so much more so—infinitely much more than that. It came to me then like a flash, how wrong

—wickedly wrong I had been. Everything disappeared but you and me. It was not your body that I loved. It was not the body that that broken thing had been that I loved, but it was you—*you*, the inner something for whose sake I had loved the Richard Daunt that I knew.

"You could not speak to me. You did not know that I was there. You could not plead with me, but my own self pleaded. You'll never have to beg me to stay or go with you again. You need me now—only I know how much. You cannot even know that I am near you, that I am talking to you, that I am telling you all about it. I know that you will never see this letter, and yet somehow it eases my heart a little to write it. I have read over all the letters that you have sent me, and they are such brave, such true letters. I understand them now. They have been read and cried over a great many times since you wrote them.

"I am waiting now every day, every hour when I can tell you all this with my own lips, and

when your dear eyes will open again and smile up into mine with the old boyish smile—and when you will put your arms around my neck and tell me that you know all about it, and that you forgive me."

Her tears had been dropping fast upon the page, and she stopped from time to time to wipe them with the draping meshes of her loose, rust-colored hair. She did not even turn as she heard a hand at the door.

"Why, Margaret!" said Lois, "it is two o'clock in the morning, and I have just finished my last round. Come, child, you must go to bed at once. I see that I have got to be a stern chaperon. What! writing?"

"It is a letter," said Margaret. "I have just finished it." She lifted the tongs and poked the fire-logs until there was a crackling blaze, then she gathered up the loose ink-stained sheets carefully, and, leaning forward, laid them in a square white heap upon the red embers. The flame sprang up and around them, reaching for them

voraciously. And Lois, seeing the action, but making no comment, came and sat down on the rug beside Margaret, and wistfully and tenderly drew the brown, bowed head into her sisterly arms.

XVII.

"Lois"—Mrs. Goodno, standing in the doorway, drew her favorite close beside her—"look at the picture coming down the hall! Isn't she beautiful?" There was a spontaneous and genuine admiration in her tone as she spoke.

A something indefinable, an atmosphere of loveliness, seemed to breathe from Margaret's every motion as she came toward them. Her cheeks had a delicate flush, her glance was bright and roving, and her perfect lips were tremulous. Her look had a new mystery in it—a brooding tenderness, like the look of a young mother.

"All through the nurses' lecture this morning," said Lois, "I noticed her. When she smiled it made one want to smile, too!"

As Margaret reached them and greeted Mrs. Goodno, Lois joined her, and the two girls walked down the hall together to their room.

"Now," said Lois, as she took a text-book from the drab-backed row on the low corner shelf, and assumed a judicial demeanor, "I'm morally certain that you haven't studied your Weeks-Shaw this morning, and I'm going to quiz you."

Margaret broke into a laugh. "Try it," she said gayly. "You're going to ask me to define health, and to show the difference between objective and subjective symptoms, and tell you what is a mulberry-tongue. Health is a perfect circulation of pure blood in a sound organism. How is that?"

"Good!" Lois, sitting down by the window, was laughing, too. "When the doctor quizzes you, you may not know it so well! Suppose you explain to me the theory of counter-irritants."

Margaret swooped down upon her, and kneeling by her chair, put both hands over the page,

looking up into her face. "Don't!" she said. "What do I care for it all to-day! Oh, Lois! Lois!" she whispered in the hushed voice of a child about to tell a dear secret, "I am so happy! I am so happy that I can't tell it! To think that I can watch him and nurse him, and take his temperature! I can help cure him and see him get better and better every day. When he talks, he pronounces queerly and his words get all jumbled up, and his sentences have no ends to them, but I love to hear it—I know what they are trying to say! He is so weak that I feel as if I were his mother. I know you've told Mrs. Goodno; haven't you, dear? Somehow I knew it just now when she smiled at us! I don't care if you did—not a bit—if she will only let me stay by him."

Lois patted the bronzing gloss of the uplifted head. "I did tell her," she said. "I thought I ought to—but she understands. Never fear about that."

"I wonder what makes me so happy! I love all the world, Lois! Did you ever feel that way?"

The light wing of a shadow brushed the face above her, and deep in its eyes darkled a something hidden there that was almost envy.

The voice went running on: "Suppose he should open his eyes suddenly to-night—conscious! Do you know what I would do? I would slip off this apron all in a minute, so he should see me and know me first of all. I have my hair the way he likes it. I wish I could do more for him! Love is service. I want to tire myself out doing things to help him. Why, only think! It was my fault he was hurt. I sent him away when it was breaking my heart to do it."

"If he should know you to-day, dear," Lois said, her face flashing into a smile, "it ought to help him get well. There is joy bubbling out all over you!"

"I'm so glad he's not conscious now, for when he isn't he doesn't suffer. Sometimes last night he seemed to, and then I ached all over to suffer for him. I could laugh out loud through the pain, to think that I was bearing it for him! Oh,

Lois, I haven't understood. I see now what you love in this life here. It isn't only bodies that you are curing; it's souls—that you're making sound houses for."

Drawing Lois's arm through hers, Margaret pointed to where the huge entrance showed, from the deep window. "Do you know, the first day we came in there together, I was the unhappiest girl in the world. It seemed as though I was being dragged into some dreadful black cave, where there was no sun, no flowers, nothing but ghastly sights and people that were dying! The first day I went with you through the wards I hated it. I wanted to shut my eyes and run away as far as I could from it!"

"I know that; I saw it."

"But now that is all changed. I never shall see a body suffer again without wanting to put my hands on it and soothe it. Life is so much sweeter and deeper than I knew! It's hard to be quiet. I'm walking to music. I must go around all the time singing. It seems wicked of me to

be so happy when I know that it will be days and days yet before he can even sit up and let me read to him. But I can't help it. I was so wretched all the time before, that the joy now seems to be a part of me. It seems to be his joy, too. He would be glad if he could know that, in spite of all I thought and everything I said, I love him now as he wanted me to, and that nothing ever can come between us again! Isn't it time to go in yet? I can hardly wait for the hour!"

Lois looked at her watch. "It's near enough," she said. "Come. Dr. Faulkner is somewhere in the ward now, and I must get instructions."

Daunt lay perfectly quiet, his restless hand still. An orderly was changing the phials upon the glass-topped table and nodded to them.

Lois darted a quick glance at the face on the pillow, and her own changed. A stealthy fear crept over her. Margaret's head was turned away toward the cot. How should she tell her? How let her know that subtle change of the last

few hours that her own trained eye noted? How let out for her the strenuous agony that waited in that room? The pitiful unconsciousness of evil in the graceful posture went through her with a start of anguish.

The soft footfall of the visiting surgeon drew near, and with swift prescience she moved close to Margaret. He bent over the figure in rapid professional inquiry and consulted the chart, nodding his head as he tabulated his observations in a running, semi-audible comment.

"H—m! well-developed septic fever. Delirium comes on at night, you say, nurse. Eh? H—m! Pulse very rapid and stringy—hurried and shallow breathing—eyes dull, with inequality of pupils. H—m! Face flushed—lips blue—extremities cold. Lips and teeth covered with sordes—typical case. H—m! Complete lethargy—clammy sweat—face assuming a hippocratic type. Temperature sub-normal. H—m! Yes. Nurse, please preserve all notes of this case. It's interesting. Very. Like to see it in the 'Record.'"

"What are the probabilities, doctor?" It was the sentence. Lois's lips were trembling, and she put a hand on Margaret's arm.

"Probabilities? H—m! Give him about twelve hours and that's generous. Never any hope in a case of this kind. Why, the man's dying now. Look at his face."

A piteous, chalky whiteness swept like a wave over Margaret's cheeks, but she had made no sound. When the doctor was quite gone, she swerved a little on her feet, as though her limbs had weakened, and her lips opened and shut voicelessly, as if whispering to herself. Lois dreaded a cry, but there was none; she only shut her eyes, and covered her poor face, gone suddenly pinched and pallid, with her two hands.

"Wait, Margaret." Lois held out a hand whose professional coolness was touched with an unwonted tremor. "Wait a moment, dear." She ran to the hall to see that no one was in sight. Then running back and putting her arm around Margaret's shoulders, she led her, blind and unresisting, to the stair.

XVIII.

The house surgeon stretched his long legs lazily in a corner of the office and looked at the hospital superintendent through the purplish haze from his cigar. "I wonder, Goodno," he said, "that you have time to get interested in any one case among so many. I'd like to see the one you speak of pull through; it's a rather unusual case, and a trephine always absorbs me."

Dr. Goodno lighted a companion cigar. "My interest in him isn't wholly professional," he answered slowly. "It's personal. In the first place, he isn't an Italian stevedore or a Pole peddler from Baxter street. He is a man of a great deal of promise. He has published a book or two, I believe. And in the second place, my wife is very much concerned."

"Always seems to be the trouble, doesn't it?

Enter a romance!" Dr. Irwin waved his hand widely.

"Yes, it's a romance. To tell the truth, Irwin, Mrs. Goodno knows of the young woman, and I can't tell you how anxious she is about him. There's nothing sadder to me than a case like that."

"Ah!" the other said, "that's because you're a married man. The rest of us haven't time to grow sympathetic. I should say that the particular young woman would be a great deal better off, judging from present indications, if he *did* die."

"Why?"

"Because, if he should recover from this septic condition, he's more than likely to be a stick for the rest of his life. It's even chances he never puts foot to the ground again. Such men are better dead, and if you gave them their choice, most of them would prefer it."

"I didn't know it was as bad as that. Dr.

Faulkner's earlier prognosis was more favorable."

"Yes, but I don't like his temperature of the last two days. He's got septic symptoms, and you know how quickly such a course ends. Well, we'll soon know, though that's more consolation to us than it might be to him, I suppose." He drummed with his fingers on the arm of the chair. "As for the girl," he continued. "Love? Pshaw! She'll get over it. What sensible woman, when she's got beyond the mooning age and the foreign missionary age, wants a cripple for a husband? If this patient should live in that way, this girl you speak of would probably get the silly notion that she wanted to marry him—trust a woman, especially a young woman, for that! If she's beautiful or wealthy, or particularly talented, it's all the more likely she would insist on tying herself up to him and nurse him and feed him gruel till her hair was gray. And what would she get out of it?"

"There might be worse lives than that." Dr. Goodno spoke reflectively.

"For her, I presume you mean?"

"Yes. Woman's love is less of a physical affinity and more a consciousness of spiritual attraction than man's."

"Teach your women that. It's not without its merits as a working doctrine. The time a woman isn't thinking about servants or babies she generally spends thinking about her soul. The word soul to her is as fascinating as a canary to an Angora cat. She takes so much stock in heaven only because she's been told it isn't material. Your material philosophies were all invented and patented by men; it's the women who keep your spiritual religions running."

"How would *you* have it?"

"Oh, it's all right as far as heaven goes! Let them believe anything they want to. But when you bring the all-soul idea down into every-day life, it's mawkish. When you go about preaching that love is a spiritual 'affinity,' for instance."

"Well?"

"You may believe **it,** understand. But you gloss over the other side. The general opinion is that 'bodily' isn't a nice word to use when we discuss love. You and I, as physicians, see every day the results of this dislike to recognize the material side in what has been called the 'young person.' Women are taught from childhood to regard the immensely human and emotional sensibilities as linked to sin. The sex-stirring in them, they are led to imagine evil and a wrong to possess. They are taught instinctively to condemn rather than to respect the growth and indications of their own natures. The profound attraction of one sex to the other which marks the purest and most ennobling passion—the trembling delight in the merest touch or caress—the bodily thrill at the passing presence or footfall of the one beloved—these they come to believe a shame to feel and a death to confess. It is the teaching that makes for the morbid. A great deal of mental suffering which leaves its mark

upon the growing woman might be avoided if men and women were more honest with themselves. A soulless woman is just as much use in the world as a bodiless one—or a man either, for that matter."

Dr. Goodno regarded him musingly. "Granted there is a good deal of truth in what you say," he said. "When I spoke of woman's love as more of a spiritual and less of a material affinity than man's, I meant that it does not require so much from the senses to feed upon. Sex has a psychology, and it is a fact which has been universally noted that all that concerns the mental aspect of sex is exhibited in greater proportionate force by women. Does not this seem to imply that love to a woman is more of a mental element and less of a physical?"

"Nonsense! More of a mental, but only so because more of a physical, too. All love's mental delights come originally from the physical side. How many women do you see falling in love with twisted faces and crooked joints? A

hand stands for a hand-clasp; a face for a kiss! Love becomes a 'spiritual' passion only after it has blossomed on physical expression. Not before."

The other shook his head doubtfully.

"If your view were the correct one," pursued Irwin, "women, in all their habitual acts of fascination (which are Nature's precursors of love) would strive more to touch the mental, the spiritual side of men. But they don't. They apply their own self-learned reasoning to the opposite sex. They decorate themselves for man with the feathers of male birds (you'll find that in your Darwin), which Nature gave the male birds to charm the females. They strike at his senses, and they hit his mental side, when he has any, through them."

"You're a sad misogynist, Irwin!" Dr. Goodno was smiling, but there was a sub-note of earnestness beneath the lightness of his tone. "And you forget that women have an imaginative and ideal side which is superior to man's. They can create

the mental, possibly, where men are most dependent upon sense-impression. Love involves more of the soul in woman, Irwin."

The house surgeon unwound his legs. "Or less," he said tersely. "Havelock Ellis says a good thing. He says that while a man may be said to live on a plane, a woman is more apt to live on the upward or downward slope of a curve. She is always going up or coming down. That's why a woman, when an artificial civilization hasn't stepped in to forbid it, is forever talking about her health. And, spiritually, as well as physically, she is just as apt to be coming down as going up. Her proportion is wrong. Your bad woman disrespects her soul; your good woman disrespects her body. The wholesome woman disrespects neither and respects both. But very few young women are wholesome nowadays. Their training has been against it! The best way for a woman to treat her soul is to realize that her soul and body belong together, and have to live together the rest of her natural life. She

needn't forget this just because she happens to fall in love! No woman can marry a man whom accident has robbed of his physical side and not wrong herself. She shuts off the avenues of her senses. There is no thrill of ear or hand—no comeliness for her eye to dwell upon, and her spiritual love, so beautiful to begin with, starves itself slowly to death!"

"Very good on general principles," said Dr. Goodno. "That's the trouble. It's easy enough to sermonize in the pulpit, or the clinic either, but when we come to concrete examples, it's difficult. The particular instance is troublesome. Now, in the case of this man in the surgical ward, if he recovered at all, but remained a hopeless cripple, you would pack him off into a rayless solitude for the rest of his life, and tell the girl who loves him to go and love somebody else. You wouldn't leave it to her—even if he was willing."

"Wouldn't *you?*"

"No! I would be afraid to arrogate to myself the judgment upon two human souls. There are

times when what we call consistency vanishes and something greater and more noble stands up to make it ashamed. I'll tell you now, Irwin, if the one woman in the world to me—the woman I loved—if my wife—had been brought where the case we've been speaking of promises to be—if there were nothing but her eyes left and the something that is back of them—I tell you, I'd have married her! Yes, and I'd have thanked God for it!"

His companion tossed the dead butt of his cigar into the grate and rose to go to the ward. "Goodno," he said, and his voice was unsteady, "I believe it! You would; and I wish to the Lord I knew what that meant!"

The superintendent sat long thinking. He was still pondering when his wife entered the room. "I've just been talking with Irwin," he said, "about the last trephine case—the one you spoke to me of. He doesn't seem too hopeful, I'm sorry to say."

She did not answer.

"By the way," he continued, "I saw your new nurse protégée to-day. Langdon, I believe her name is. She is a lovely girl; I think I never saw a brighter, sweeter face in my life."

Mrs. Goodno had gone to the window and stood looking out. "Doctor," she said, "I've bad news. Dr. Faulkner has just seen Mr. Daunt, and—he is dying."

Something in her voice caught him. He rose and came beside her, and saw that her eyes were full of tears. He drew her head to his shoulder and smoothed her hair gently. He could feel her hands quiver against his arm. His thoughts fled far away—somewhere—where the one for whose sorrow she cried must be uncomforted. "Poor girl! Poor girl!" he said.

XIX.

As they entered the room, Lois turned the key in its lock and bent a long, penetrating gaze on Margaret.

She lay huddled against the welter of bedclothes, silent, inert, pearl-pale spots on her cheeks like gray-white smothers of foam over fretting rocks. Her eyes were closed and her breath came chokingly, like a child's after a draught of strong medicine. Suddenly, as Lois stood pondering, she kneeled upright on the bed, holding her arms out before her.

"Oh, God!" she cried, "don't let him die! Please don't! He can't—he can't die! Why, he's Richard—Richard Daunt. It's only an accident. He can't die that way. God—God!"

"Hush, dear! Oh, dear! What can I say?" cried Lois.

Margaret slipped to the floor, dragging the covers with her, and burying her face in the fleecy cuddle. There she writhed like some trodden thing.

"Oh, dear God!" she sobbed, "just when I knew. He can't die now! It's just to punish me; I've been wicked, but I didn't mean to be. I only wanted his good! If he had only died before I knew it! Only let him live till I can tell him, God. I'm not a wicked woman—you know how I tried. A wicked woman wouldn't have tried. Oh, God, he doesn't even know! I can't tell him. I've suffered already. If he died, I couldn't feel worse than I have all this time. Let me think he's going to die, but don't let him. *Don't let him!* I want him so! It isn't for that that I want him! I know now. I thought it was the other. But I wasn't so wicked as that. I've been selfish. I've been thinking I was good to keep him away, but I wasn't. I was cruel. He loved me the right way. Oh, if I could only forget how he talked!—and he didn't know what

he was saying. I've hated myself ever since. If he dies, I shall hate myself forever! I don't deserve that! I'm not so bad as that! I *couldn't* be. I'm willing to be punished in other ways—in any other way—but not this, God! I can't stand it!

"I don't ask for him as he was! I don't care how he looks! Give him to me just as he is. Give him to me crippled and helpless, and let me care for him all my life. Oh, God, it isn't so much that I ask! It's such a little thing for you to grant! Why, every day you let some one get well, some one who isn't half as much to anybody as he is to me. If I were asking something I oughtn't to—something sinful, it would be different! But it can't be bad to want him to get well! I'll be better all my life to have him. It isn't much—I'll never ask you anything else as long as I live! Only let him live—don't take him away! I don't care if he can never walk again, if he can only know me, and love me still! God, his life is so precious to me; it's worth more than all the

world. If he died, I would want to die, too. God! Hasn't he suffered enough? How can you watch him—how can you see what he is suffering now and not let him live? You can if you want to! There are so many millions and millions of people, and this is just one of them. Oh, for Christ's sake—for Christ's sake!"

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret!" wailed Lois, falling beside her, as though physical contact could soothe her. "Don't go on like that! Don't! Oh, it's too cruel! You break my heart! Darling, darling! He isn't dead yet. Maybe—maybe——" She stopped then, choking, but pressing her hands hard on Margaret's cheeks, on her hair, on her breast, her limbs, as though to press back the nerves that she felt throbbed to bursting.

Margaret struggled to her feet, swaying with the paroxysm just passed. Her eyes were unwet and bright, and her teeth were clenched tightly on her under lip.

"No, he isn't dead," she said slowly, as though to force conviction on herself. "He isn't—dead.

Doctors are mistaken sometimes, aren't they?" she asked dully. "Yes, I know! They are! Dr. Irwin told me so himself. 'The prognostications of surgery can in no case be considered infallible.' That's what he said in the lecture yesterday. I wrote it down in my note-book. That means that he may not die. Oh! I've got to believe that. *I've got to!* Can't you see that I've got to? You don't believe he will live! I see it in your face. When the doctor said that just now, you looked just as he did. He might have stabbed me just as well. Why! I'd rather die myself a million times—but it wouldn't do any good! It wouldn't do any good!"

Margaret moved to the fire and spread out her hands before the blaze, as though her mind unconsciously sought relief from strain in an habitual action. But her chattering teeth showed that she was unconscious of its warmth.

She looked up at the countenance of La Belle Jardinière above the fireplace. The mild gaze which had once held reproach now seemed to

bend down full of pitiful tenderness. Her bright, miserable eyes rested on the placid figure.

"You don't know," she said slowly, "what I am praying for. If it were a little child—*my* little child—that I were asking for, you would understand. You can only pity me, but you can never, never know!"

She turned and walked up and down the floor, her steps uneven with anguish, her fingers laced and unlaced in tearless convulsion, and her throat contracting with soundless sobs.

Lois watched her, her mind saying over and over to itself: "If she would only cry! If she would only cry!" There was something more terrible than tears in this inarticulate anguish. At last she went and stood in Margaret's way, clinging entreatingly to her. "Do let me help you, dear! Lie down and let me cover you up and make you some tea! Do please, dear!" She stopped, struck by the ashy pallor of her face.

"No, no, Lois. I can't stay here! Think! He may be dying *now!* I *must* go to him! Oh,

you have got to let me—they can't forbid me that. I was going to stay with him to-night, anyway. You know I was! I can't let him die! He *shan't!* I'll fight it off with him. I don't care what Dr. Faulkner says; I don't care what you think! You mustn't say no, Lois! Oh, Lois, darling! I'll die now, right here, if you don't." She dropped on her knees at Lois's feet, catching her hand and kissing it in grovelling entreaty.

"You know I'll have to let you, if you ask like that!" cried Lois. "I'm only thinking of you—and of him," she added. "You know if you should break down——"

"But I won't—I won't!" A gulping hiccough strained her, and Lois poured out a glass of water for her hastily, and stood over her while she swallowed it in choking mouthfuls.

XX.

In the dimmed light Margaret bent above Daunt's bed to wipe away the creeping, beady sweat that lay on the forehead, and laid her fingers on his wrist. Then she came close to Lois. She had bitten her lip raw and her neck throbbed out and in above her close collar.

"It's fluttering," she whispered piteously, "and he's so cold! See how pinched and blue his nose is. Oh, God—Lois!"

The rustle and stir of the early waking city soaked in fine-filtered sounds through the window. Of what use were its multitudinous strivings, its tangled hopes, its varied suffering? The unending quiet of softened noises beyond the spotless, ruffled screens hurt her. She could have

screamed, inarticulately, frantically, to scare away that dreadful, stolid, lethargic thing that sprawled in the air. Her nails left little, curved, purpled dents in her palms that smarted when she unclenched her fingers. It would be easier to bear it if he cried out—if he babbled unmeaningness, or hurled reproaches. Only—that still prostration, that anxious expression about the lines of the forehead, that silence, growing into—— No, no! Not that! Not—death!

Lois sat aching fiercely at the smouldering longing in the shadowy depths of the other's spaniel-like eyes. The tawny-brown surge of her hair, swept back from her forehead, stood out against the white of the blank wall, cameo-like. She suddenly crouched by Lois's chair, grasping at her. "Lois, Lois!" she said, low and with fearful intensity; "it's come! Help me to fight it! Help me!"

"What has come? What?"

"Fear! It's looking at me everywhere. It's looking between the screens! I must keep it

away. If I give up to it, he'll die! Press my hands—that's good. Look at him! Didn't he move then? Wasn't his face turned more? I'm —cold, Lois."

An icy frost had silvered her soul. Gaunt arms seemed to stretch from the dimness toward the bed. Then, with an effort which left her weak, she thrust back her imaginings, rose, and sat down by the pillow. Her eyes glanced fearfully from side to side, then above, as though questioning from what direction would come this relentless foe.

Through her dazed brain rushed, clamorous, reiterating, a prayer-blent, defiant appeal. She saw God sitting on a draped throne, but His face was merciless. He would not help her! Of what virtue was this all-filling love of hers if it could not save one little human life? He was dying—dying—dying! And he *must not* die! She remembered a night, far back in her misty childhood, when she had crept through evening shadows to see a soul take flight. The Death

Angel then was a kindly friend sent to set free a shining twin; now it was a ghastly monster, lying in wait and chuckling in the silences.

She pressed Daunt's nerveless hand between her warm palms and strove to put the whole force of her being into a great passionate desire—a desire to send along this human conductivity the extra current of vitality which she felt throbbing and pressing in her every vein. It seemed as though she must give—give of her own bounding life, to eke out the fading powers of that dying frame. Again and again she breathed out her longing, until the very intensity of her will made her feel dizzy and weak. She would have opened her veins for him. Like the Roman daughter, she would have given her breast to his lips and the warmth from her limbs to aid him.

Once she started. "You shall! You shall!" seemed to patter in flying echoes all about her. It was Daunt's cry by the fields at Warne, that had gone leaping from his lips to her heart like a vibrant, inspiring fire. Did that virile will still

lie living, overlapped with the wing of disease, sending its stubborn strength out now to bolster her own? She glanced at the waxy face, half expecting to see the bloodless lips falling back from the words.

Daunt lay motionless. The ice-pack had been removed from his head, and the shaven temple showed paste-like beneath the bandage-edge. From time to time Lois poured between his lips a teaspoonful of diluted brandy, and, at such times, Margaret would put her strong arms under his head and raise it from the pillow, outwardly calm, but inwardly shuddering with wrenching jerks of pain.

So the slow, weary night dragged away. The house surgeon looked in once, bent over the patient a moment, and, without examination, went away.

The morning broke, and through the walls the dim, murmurous hum of street traffic penetrated in a muffled whisper. Then the gray of the late

dawn crept about the room, noiseless-footed, like one walking over graves. Suddenly Lois, who had been sitting with closed eyes, felt a touch on her shoulder. It was Margaret, and she pointed silently to Daunt. Lois started forward with a shrinking fear that the end had come unperceived, but a glance reassured her. The rigid outlines of his features seemed to have relaxed; an indefinable something, a warmth, a tinge, a flexibility seemed to have fallen upon the drawn cheeks. It was something scarce tangible enough to be noted; something evasive, and yet, to Lois's trained senses, unmistakable. It was a light loosening of the grip of Death, a tentative withdrawing of the forces of the destroyer.

Lois turned with a quick and silent gesture, and the two girls looked at each other steadfastly. Into Margaret's eyes sprang a trembling, eager light of joy.

"We mustn't hope too much, dear," Lois whispered, "but I think—I think that there is a little change. Wait until I call Dr. Irwin."

The house surgeon bent over the cot with his finger upon Daunt's pulse. "This is another one on Faulkner," he said. "It beats all how things will go. Said he'd give him twelve hours, did he? Well, this patient has his own ideas about that. He evidently has marvellous recuperative powers or else the age of miracles isn't past. Better watch this case very carefully and report to me every hour or so. You can count," he smiled at Lois, "on being mighty unpopular with Faulkner. He doesn't like to have his opinions reversed this way, and he is pretty sure to lay it on the nurse."

As the doctor disappeared, all the strength which Margaret had summoned to her aid seemed to vanish in one great wave of weakening which overspread her spirit. Everything swam before her eyes. She sank upon the chair and laid her arms outstretched upon the table. Then she slowly dropped her head upon them.

XXI.

It was late afternoon. The fiery sun had just dipped below the jagged Adirondack hill-peaks to the south, still casting a carmine glow between the scattered and low-boughed pines. The square window of the high-ceiled sanitarium room was specked with pale-appearing stars, and the snow-draped slopes beneath showed dim in the elusive beauty that lurks in soft color and low tones. Daunt lay silent, facing the window, and Margaret, tired from romping with the doctor's children, rested on a low hassock beside his reclining chair. Slowly the carmine faded from the snow, and the hastening winter-dark trailed its violescent gossamer up and down the rock-clefts and across the purpling hollows.

He turned his eyes, all at once feeling her lifted gaze. He reached out his right hand and touched the lace edge of her white nurse's cap, with a faint smile. Something in the smile and the gesture caught at her heart. She leaned suddenly toward him, and taking his hand in both her own, laid her face upon it.

He drew his hand away, breathing sharply.

"Dear!" she said. "Do you remember that afternoon on the sands? You kissed me then! I am the same Margaret now—not changed at all."

A shudder passed over him, but he did not reply.

Then she knelt beside him, quite close, laying her cheek by his face on the pillow and drawing his one live hand up to her lips. "You are everything to me," she whispered—"everything, everything! That day on the beach I was happy; but not more happy, dear, than I am now. You were everything else in the world to me then, but now you are *me,* myself! Don't turn away; look at

me!" Reaching over, she drew his nerveless left arm across her neck.

He turned his face to her with an effort, his lips struggling to speak.

"Kiss me!" she commanded.

He tried to push her back. "No! No!" he cried vehemently, drawing away. "That's past."

"Not even that! Just think how long I've waited!" She was smiling. "Richard," she said, "do you know what it means for a woman to kneel to a man like this? I haven't a bit of pride about it. Only think how ashamed I will be if you refuse to take me! What does a woman do when a man refuses her?"

A white pain had settled upon Daunt's face. "Margaret," he faltered, "don't; I can't stand it! You don't know what you say."

She kissed his hand again. "Yes, I do! I am saying just as plainly as I can that I love you; that I belong to you, and that I ask for nothing else but to belong to you as long as I live."

His hand made a motion of protest.

"I want you just as much as I did the day you first kissed me. I want the right to stay with you always and care for you."

He winced visibly. "'Care for me!'" he repeated. "It would be *all* care. I have nothing to bring you now but sorrow and regret. I'm not the Daunt who offered himself to you at Warne. I'm only a fragment. I had health and hopes then. I had beautiful dreams, Margaret—dreams of work and a home and you. I shan't ever forget those dreams, but they can never come true!"

She smoothed his hand caressingly. "I have had dreams, too," she answered. "This is the one that comes oftenest of all. It is about you and me." She turned her head, with a spot of color in either cheek. "Sometimes it is in the day. You are lying, writing away at a new book of yours, and I am filling your pipe for you, while the tea is getting hot. I see you smile up to me and say, 'Clever girl! how did you know I wanted a smoke?' Then you read your last chapter to

me, and I tell you how I wouldn't have said it the way the woman in the story does, and you pretend you are going to change it, and don't.

"Sometimes it is in the evening, and we are looking out at the sunset just as we have been doing to-night."

He would have spoken, but she covered his mouth with her hand. His moist breath wrapped her palm.

"And then it is dark and there is a big red lamp on the table—the one I had in my old room—and I am reading the latest novel to you, and when we have got to the end, you are telling me how you would have done it."

While she had been speaking, glowing and dark-eyed, a mystical peace—a divine forgetfulness had touched him. He lifted his hand to his forehead, feeling her soft fingers. The pictures she painted were so sweet!

Presently he threw his arm down with a swallowed sob. The dream-scene faded, and he lay once more helpless and despairing, weighted with

the heaviness of useless limbs, a numb burden for whom there could be no love, no joy, nothing but the inevitable rebuke of enduring pain. He smoothed the wide dun-gold waves of her hair gently.

"You are not for such a sacrifice, Margaret," he said sadly. "I am not such a coward. You are a woman—a perfect, beautiful woman—the kind that God made all happiness for."

"But I couldn't be happy without you!" she cried.

"Nor with me," he answered. "No, I've got to face it! All the long years I should watch that womanhood of yours growing dimmer and less full, your outlook narrowing, your life's sympathies shrinking. I shall be shut up to myself and grow away from the world, but you shall not grow away from it with me! It would be a crime! I should come to hate myself. I want you to live your life out worthily. I would rather remember you as you are now, and as loving me once for what I was!"

Margaret's eyes were closed. She was thinking of Melwin and Lydia.

"Woman needs more to fill her life than the love of a man's mind. She wants more, dear. She wants the love of the heart-beat. She wants home—the home I wanted to make for you—the kind I used to dream of—the——" His voice broke here and failed.

The door pushed open without a knock. A tiny night-gowned figure stood swaying on the sill, outlined sharply against the glare of lamplight.

"Vere's 'iss Mar'det?" he said in high baby key. "I yants her to tiss me dood-night!"

Margaret's hand still lay against Daunt's cheek, and as she drew it away, she felt a great hot tear suddenly wet her fingers.

XXII.

Snow had fallen in the night—a wet snow, mingled with sleet and fleering rain. It had spread a flashing, silver sheen over the vast wastes, and the sun glinted and laughed from a web of woven jewels. It gleamed from every needle of the stalwart evergreens, which stood around in dazzling ice-armor, keeping guard above the virgin snow asleep, with its white curves dimpling beside the rough, bearish mountains. Overhead the sky bent in tranquil baby-blue.

The beauty of the frozen morning hung cheerily about the row of pillowed chairs wheeled before the glass sides of the long sun-parlor. To some who gazed from these chairs it was a glimpse of the world into which they would soon

return; to others it was but the symbol of another weary winter of lengthening waiting. But to each it brought a comfort and a hope.

The same fair whiteness of the outdoors shone mockingly through Daunt's window. Its very loveliness seemed cruel, with that insidious raillery with which Nature, be she gloomy or bright, fits our darker moods. Through the night, while Margaret's phantom touch lay upon his forehead, and the ghosts of her kisses crept across his hand, he had fought with his longing, and he had won. But it was a triumphless victory. The pulpy ashes of his own denial were in his mouth. He had asked so little—only to see her, to hear her step, and the lisping movement of her dress, and the cadence of her voice—only to feel the touch of her fingers and the drench of her warm, young life! She loved him; his love, he told himself, incomplete as it was, would take the place of all for her. And in his heart he told himself that he lied!

But the rayless darkness of that inner room cast no shadow in the cozy sun-parlor. There, the doctor, with youthful step that belied his graying hair, strode about among the patients, chatting lightly, and full of good-natured badinage. Then, leaving them smiling, he went back to his private office. As he entered, Margaret rose from the chair where she waited, and came hurriedly toward him. She was pale, and her slender hands were clasping nervously about her wrists.

"Doctor," she began, and stopped an instant. Then stumblingly, "I have just got your note. I came to ask you—I want to beg you to—not to make me go back! I—want to stay so much! I know so well how to wait on him. You know I wasn't a regular nurse at the hospital. It was only a trial. Dr. Goodno doesn't expect me back."

He drew out a chair for her and made her sit down, wiping his glasses laboriously. "My dear child—Miss Langdon—" he said, "I know how

you feel. My good friend Mrs. Goodno wrote me of you when Mr. Daunt came to us. She is a splendid, noble-hearted woman, and she wrote of you as though you were her own daughter. You see," he continued, "when you first came, it was suspected that Mr. Daunt's peculiar paralysis might be of a hysteric type, and might yield naturally, under treatment, with a bettering physical condition, or, possibly, under the impulse of some extra nervous stimulus. Such cases are not unmet with."

"Yes, yes," she said anxiously.

He polished his glasses again. "I am sorry to say," he went on, "that we have long ago abandoned this hope, as you know. Such being the case, it seems, under the peculiar circumstances, advisable—that is, it would be better not to——" He stopped, feeling that he was floundering in deeper water than he thought.

"Oh, if you only knew!" Margaret's voice was shaking. "I came here because I love him, doctor, and because he loved me! Surely I can

at least stay by him. I am experienced enough to nurse him. It's the only thing left now for me to be happy in. He wants me! He's more cheerful when I am with him. I know he doesn't really need a special nurse, but—I don't have to earn the money for it. I do it because I like it."

"My dear young lady," the doctor said, wheeling, with suspicious abruptness, in his chair, "be sure that it is only your own best good that is considered. There are cruel facts in life that we have to face. This seems very hard for you now, I know. It *is* hard! He is a brave man, and believe me, my child, he knows best."

Margaret half rose from her seat. "'He'?—*he* knows best—Richard? Does *he* say—did Mr. Daunt——"

He took her hand as a father might. "It was not easy for him," he said simply.

She bowed her head in piteous acquiescence, and held his fingers a moment, her lips striving courageously for a smile, and then went silently out.

As she passed Daunt's closed door on the way to her room, she stretched out her arms and touched its dark panels softly, fearfully, and then leaned forward, and once laid her lips against the hard grained wood.

An hour later, from where he lay, Daunt could see the bulbous, ulstered figure of the colored driver as he waited by the porch to take his single passenger to the distant Lake station. He could see the rake of the horses' ears as the man swung his arms, pounding his sides to keep the blood circulating. His steamy breath made a curdling smoke-cloud about his peaked cap.

Daunt's blood forged painfully as the square ormolu clock on the mantel pointed near to the hour. There were lines of sleeplessness beneath his eyes; his face was instinct with suffering. Through his open door came the mingled tones of conversation in the rooms beyond.

He was sitting up, his vigorous hair, grown over-long during his illness, blending its hue with

that of the dark chair-cushion. The white collar that he wore seemed to have lent its pallor to his cheeks.

He felt himself to have aged during the night. Through the long weeks since his accident, he had hoped against hope. The doctors had talked speciously of change of scene and bracing mountain air. He had been glad enough to leave the foreboding atmosphere of the hospital for this more cheery hill-top harbor. He had never known nor asked by what arrangement Margaret was now with him; it had seemed only natural that it should be so. His patches of delirium memories were every one brightened by her face and touch, and this state had merged itself gradually into the waking consciousness when she was always by. Without questioning, he had come to realize that whatever might have risen between them in the past was forever gone, and rested content in her near presence and the promise of the future.

But as the weeks dragged themselves by he had

come to know, with a kind slowness of realization, that this hope must die. In their late talks, both of them had tacitly recognized this. In the night of his growing despair, she had been his one star. Now he must shut out that ray with his own hands and turn his face to the intolerable dark.

When her head had been next his on the pillow, with his nostrils full of the clean, grassy fragrance of her hair—when her hand had closed his lips and her voice had plead with him, he had seen, as through a lightning-rift, the enormity of the selfishness with which he had let his soul be tempted. From that moment there was for him but one way—*this* way. And he had accepted it unflinchingly, heroically.

The spring of the wide stairway broke and turned half way up, and from where he sat his eye sighted the landing and that slim figure coming slowly down. It was the old Margaret in street dress. Above the fur of her close, fawn

cloth coat, her hopeless eyes looked over the balustrade along which her slight, gloved hand slid weakly, as though seeking support for her limbs.

She crossed the threshold and came toward him, with her eyes half closed, as though in a maze of grief. The hollows beneath them looked bruised, and her features pinched like a child's with the cold. Gropingly and blindly, one hand reached out to him, the other she pressed close to her throat. She was bathed in a wave of violent trembling.

Every stretching fibre in Daunt's being responded. He could feel the shuddering palpitation through her suède glove. His self-restraint hung about him like heavy chains, which the quiver of an eyelash, the impulse of a sigh, would start into clamorous vibration.

He looked up and their eyes met once. Her gaze clung to him. His lips formed, rather than spoke, the word "Good-by." Then he put her

hand aside and turned his head from her, not to see her go.

His strained ear heard her uncertain footfalls, and the agony of his mind counted them! Now she was by the table. Now her hand was on the knob. Now—— He sprang around, facing her at the sound of a stumble and a dulled blow; she had pitched forward against the opened door, swaying—about to fall.

As her knees touched the floor, a scream burst shrill in the silence of the room—a scream that pierced the drowsy quiet of the sun-parlor and brought the doctor running through the hall.

"Margaret!"

Its intensity dragged her from the swoon. She turned her head. Daunt was standing in the middle of the floor, his eyes shining with fluctuant fire, his arms—*both* arms—stretched out toward her.

"Margaret!" he screamed. "Margaret! I can walk!"