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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BIGAMIST ***

F.E. Mills Young

"The Bigamist"

Chapter One.

In the handsome room, softly lighted with shaded electric lamps, a man sat in a low chair, his legs stretched out compass-wise, his brow resting on his hand. He had the appearance of being asleep, save that every now and again the fingers pressing his brow pressed harder or were momentarily relaxed; he made no other movement: for fully half an hour he had not altered his pose. The only other occupant of the room, a woman, tall and slender, with a wealth of golden hair crowning her small head, stood at the long open window with her back to the room, her pose as still as the man's, but considerably less absorbed.

The girl, she was little more than a girl, despite the five years of happy married life, and the tiny mite of four asleep in the nursery overhead, turned from the open window and the soft darkness of the summer night and faced the lighted room. So long the man had sat there silent, motionless, plunged in thought, that she had almost forgotten his presence in a pleasant reverie of her own till roused by the extraordinary quiet, as effectually as though recalled by some unexpected sound. She turned her head and regarded him with surprised, inquiring eyes.

"Worried, Herbert?" she asked.

He started at the sound of her voice, and roused himself with an effort.

"What makes you ask that?" he said, without looking at her.

"I don't know... You are so quiet," she answered. "And at dinner I fancied you seemed a little put out."

She crossed to his chair and knelt beside him, resting her clasped hands on his shoulders, her face lifted to his. He put out a hand and touched her hair.—"Pamela," he said abruptly, "you've been happy with me? You've—I've made you happy?" he insisted.

She looked surprised: a faint questioning showed in the blue eyes and the slight puckering of the finely pencilled brows.

"My dear!" she said. "You know that." She pulled his face down to hers and kissed him. "You never doubted me?" she asked.

"No," he answered,—"no."

Suddenly he caught her to him and held her strained against his breast.

"Oh! but it's good to have you," he cried. "You are the best thing that life has given me. I'd fight till my last breath to keep you."

"Well, but there isn't any fear of your losing me," she said, and drew back to regard him, perplexed at this unusual demonstration from a man who, save in moments of passionate excess, was habitually rather reserved. "Silly person! Did you think I was going to run away?"

"You couldn't," he answered confidently. "You are chained here to my side with invisible, unbreakable bonds."

"Oh; there's the divorce court," she remarked with light-hearted flippancy.

"I wasn't referring to social laws," he answered gravely. "The bond that holds you is the strength of our love. It is the one invincible power in the world. Whatever happened, you would never cease to love me, Pamela."

He made the statement with a look which seemed to question her. Pamela responded to the look.

"No," she answered, her sweet face grown suddenly very earnest. "I could never cease to love you. That's the surest thing in heaven or earth to me."

He set her aside and stood up. Then he lifted her to her feet and put his arm about her and drew her towards the open window.

"Come into the garden," he said. "The air indoors stifles me. I don't want to talk. I want to be in the open and feel you near."

She pressed his hand sympathetically.

"There's certainly a little worry of some sort," she said.

"Yes, there's a little worry," he answered in an evasive tone which discouraged inquiries. "But it needn't concern you."

Pamela was not naturally curious. Her husband seldom discussed his affairs with her. She did not resent this lack of confidence, but attributed it to the disparity of their ages: Pamela was twenty-six, and Herbert Arnott was forty, and rather staid and settled. He had been a widower when he married Pamela; but he never spoke of his first wife. He had been married when he was quite young and had made a hash of his early life. She knew that because he had told her when they became engaged: he did not refer to the subject again; and Pamela never knew what the first wife was like nor who her people were. Arnott was reserved about his past, and, so far as his wife knew, he was without ties or relations. He had put the old life behind him entirely when he quitted his native land; and very early Pamela learnt that it was not wise to try to get him to talk about himself and the days before she knew him. He was a man whose past was a closed book to the world, nor would he allow his wife to turn over the pages.

He had first met Pamela on board the vessel in which he sailed for South Africa. She was going out to a post as governess in a girl's college at Port Elizabeth. He had sat next her at meals in the saloon and found her congenial. When he left the ship at Cape Town he had asked her to write to him. Subsequently he had journeyed round the coast to see her, and shortly afterwards they were married. That was five years ago, and during those five years Pamela had been extraordinarily happy. She had never had even a trivial disagreement with her husband; the usual petty domestic worries had not intruded into their pleasant, easy home life. Arnott made an admirable husband, and Pamela's disposition was naturally sunny and contented. Moreover, this life of luxurious comfort as the wife of a wealthy man of independent means formed a delightful contrast to the old days of poverty and constant struggle, with nothing more inspiring ahead than a succession of years of continuous teaching, and then old age and uselessness, and a small pittance at the end. She felt grateful to Arnott for having saved her from that.

The Arnotts lived at Wynberg, that beautiful suburb of Cape Town; a place of tree-lined avenues and shady woods, dominated by the grand old mountain, its bosky slopes presenting every varying shade of colour as the seasons came and passed; its grey summit, gilded by the sunlight or shrouded softly in billowy mists, standing out against the blue remoteness of the heavens, an eternal symbol of imperishable greatness which the sea in its retreat has left in a grand isolation towering over the city and the outlying districts spreading away at its base.

Pamela was the proud and happy mistress of a fine house, and a staff of inefficient native servants. She had tried the European variety, but found them too superior, and so had fallen back on the native article whose inefficiency was qualified by unflinching good temper, though the system of British training and education was making them fairly independent too. In the years to come the dark man will compete with the white man and question his authority, perhaps even his right to rule in the land which is the heritage of the seed of Ham. The early history of Africa is written in blood, and its history is still in its infancy.

Arnott was not particularly popular in Wynberg: he was too reserved to make friends easily; but his hospitality was lavish and attracted people to the house; and his wife was a general favourite. Men admired her for her sparkling prettiness, and women took to her readily: she was easy to get on with, and she gave pleasant parties. She did not, however, form particular friendships with her own sex; she was a little shy with women and preferred male society, which is not unusual in the case of a woman whose life has been spent in schoolrooms in the unexciting transition from student to teacher, surrounded always with an atmosphere of immature femininity. Pamela never quite grasped the feminine mind, and had little sympathy with its restricted outlook. This inability to comprehend the sex of which she was a representative, she attributed to the fact that, having been saturated with feminine principles from her youth up, she had become so confused with its mass of inconsistencies that she failed utterly to realise its finer qualities. The brain of the woman teacher is usually developed on one-sided lines. Indeed, the chief failing of the average woman lies in the fact that she refuses to look at life all round, but persists in regarding it from her sole point of view; and the point of the woman is to ignore realities if by chance they happen to affront her. A want of sincerity therefore mars the beautiful vision of life.

Pamela did not consciously look at life from any particular point. So far the world had treated her well; and she accepted the pleasant condition of things, and was undemonstratively grateful.

One cloud there was in her serene sky of happiness, and that was that she had no son; the pretty little girl in the nursery had been a disappointment. Arnott, himself, had not desired children: the birth of the baby had vexed him, and Pamela's hunger for a male addition was a further aggravation. He could not understand, he told her, why one kid would not suffice. Children were a responsibility, and gave more trouble than pleasure. Certainly he derived no pleasure from his child, and Pamela was very careful that it should not be a trouble to him. She seldom had the child with her when he was present: small children possibly worried him, she decided; when the baby grew older she would make a place for herself in his heart.

"And then," she reflected, with a little rueful smile, "my nose will be out of joint."

It was odd what a pang this prospective jealousy caused her. She could not bear the thought of sharing her husband's love, even with her child. And yet there was room in her own heart for both.

"I am so happy, Herbert," she said, as they paced the garden path together in the summer dusk. "It doesn't seem right, somehow, to be so entirely satisfied. I feel at times that it is too good to last. How can it? One can't go on being happy for ever."

"Why not?" he said gruffly. "So long as one has health one can always enjoy."

"Ah! but it needs more than health," she returned. "We have such a lot of other things. Surely we shall be required to pay back some day?"

"Rot!" he answered testily. "Why should one pay for one's rights? Happiness is a right. We've got it. We'll keep it. Hold fast to it, little girl, and don't encourage morbid superstition."

He stood still in the path, and took her face between his hands, and held it so, imprisoned.

"By God!" he cried, with sudden, swift vehemence, "no power on earth shall wrest mine from me. My happiness is bound up in you, and only death can take it from me. You aren't going to escape me that way, Pam,—you are so exuberantly alive."

Pamela laughed softly, and twined her arms about his neck, drawing closer to him.

"But you'd love me sick, dear?" she said... "You'd love me sick just the same? If you were bed-ridden I'd only love you the more tenderly."

"Fishing as usual," he returned, and kissed her. "A fine emotional scene for a middle-aged married man. One would suppose we had been married five months instead of five good years."

"Five good years!" Pamela repeated, and added presently, "And they have been good. I wonder if I had never met you what I should be doing now?"

"You'd have met some one else," he answered. "Matrimony is so much more your forte than anything else."

"And you?" she hazarded. "Would you have met some one too?"

"No," he replied with a convincing directness which gratified her immensely, so that she desired to kiss him again, and only refrained from fear of irritating him with an excess of emotionalism. "I didn't set out with that idea in my mind. I should be exploring the interior, as I purposed doing—and probably have become a physical wreck with fever and other ills. You saved me from that when you bewitched me on the outward voyage."

"I didn't know I was doing it," she returned, with a quiet, satisfied laugh. "You were such a grave, reserved person. I always felt proud when you came and talked with me."

"You don't feel that now," he said banteringly.

"Not proud, no." She slipped a hand into his. "But happy always," she said, pressing his hand.

"Not so bad an admission after five years of it," he remarked with reflective complacency. "I take it that proves fairly conclusively that we were meant for each other. I don't profess to understand this old riddle of a universe, Pam; but I've grasped the human need at least; and it doesn't fit in with the world's decree that the individual should be judged according to established custom. The entire social scheme, with its restrictions and its definite rules, is nothing but a well-intentioned muddle. At the back of the new law stands the great primeval laws which refuse to be set aside."

He broke off abruptly with a short, constrained laugh, and added jerkily:

"Which windy exposition, reduced to bald commonplace, amounts to the certainty that, having discovered my need of you and your need of me, we were bound to come together whatever forces opposed... You believe that, Pamela?"

"I—don't—know," Pamela answered slowly. She turned her face and searched his by the faint light of the stars. "I'm glad there weren't any opposing forces," she said.

"Little coward!" he responded in lighter tones... "I would face any amount of opposition for you."

"Now—yes," Pamela answered. "So could I for you. But—before we were married... I don't know..."

Chapter Two.

It was the fifth anniversary of the Arnott's wedding, and Arnott had presented his wife with the customary present of jewellery: on this occasion it took the form of a rope of pearls. Pamela wore the pearls at the anniversary dinner, which function also had become a custom. It was the one entertainment during the year to which Pamela limited her invitations to the guests she especially liked; and with her careful selection was also particular in limiting the numbers. On this day, if on no other, she informed her husband, she insisted upon enjoying herself.

Arnett was quite satisfied to leave the arrangements to her; and it often transpired that he did not know who his guests were to be until they arrived. But on the day in question he did an entirely unforeseen thing, and astonished Pamela with the announcement—made while drinking tea on the stoep, and eating wedding-cake, which Pamela considered indispensable to the day—that he had met a man in town he knew and had asked him to dine.

“But,” gasped Pamela, “did you *forget* what day it is?”

“I haven’t had a chance of forgetting,” he replied, smiling. “Dare won’t clash with the harmony. I think you’ll like him.”

“Oh, like him!” she said. “That isn’t the point. He’ll be an odd man. I can’t possibly ask any one to fill up at the eleventh hour. And—good gracious, Herbert!—he’ll bring our numbers up to thirteen. What a deplorable thing for you to have done!”

He looked amused.

“Why shouldn’t thirteen people be as jolly as twelve?” he asked. “You aren’t going to make me believe that you are silly enough to feel superstitious about it; because, if you are, I’ll sit out.”

“That would spoil everything for me,” she said. “I don’t know that I’m exactly superstitious; but other people are; and some one may not like it. It’s—unfortunate.”

“I’ll motor to the Mount Nelson and put him off, if you like,” he suggested.

But Pamela negatived this.

“He’d think it so queer,” she objected.

“Not he. But he would probably conclude I was henpecked.”

“Let him come,” said Pamela resignedly. “Perhaps no one will notice at a round table that we make such an awkward total. But the next time you do a thing like that, do make it a pair.”

Pamela dressed early. She had a new frock for the occasion, white and soft and unrelieved by any colour, and she wore for her sole ornament her husband’s gift of pearls. Arnett surveyed her with critical appreciation when she entered the drawing-room. He held her by the arms under the electric light.

“By Jove! Pam, you look prettier to-night than I’ve ever seen you look,” he remarked. “I’m proud of you.”

She lifted her face to be kissed.

“Just one—on the lips,” she said. “You mustn’t crumple me.”

In the dining-room on the other side of the hall the dinner-table was already rearranged to accommodate the additional guest. A caterer from Cape Town was responsible for everything; so Pamela had no anxiety in regard to the entertainment, and felt almost a guest herself. It was such a delightfully easy way of entertaining. She had peeped into the room to inspect the table decorations, and expressed herself charmed with the whole effect. The floral design was perfect.

This mode of giving parties without any trouble, and not even being worried with the bills, which she never saw, was very agreeable. Pamela’s mind reverted often to the schoolroom days, to the prize award functions, and other entertainments of similar dulness, needing much weary preparation, and she wondered if she had ever really enjoyed those things. At the time, though often tired out with the business of organising and assisting, she had thought them pleasant enough. But she could not go back to that sort of thing, not now. Prosperity had killed her appreciation of simple pleasures.

The guests began to arrive. Dare was the last. He was indeed rather late, which Pamela thought was rude of him, until he explained that his taxi had broken down on the road. He did not make his apology immediately; it came out later in the course of conversation. At the moment of meeting his hostess the thing slipped from his mind. He showed surprise when first confronted with her. It was a very brief betrayal, just a momentary unexpected flash of something which looked like recognition in his grey-blue eyes. It passed almost immediately before she could be certain it had been there; his face was mask-like in its gravity as he shook hands with her.

He murmured something. Pamela did not quite catch what he said; but the main drift of the remark was to the effect that he appreciated the kindness which gave him this opportunity of meeting her in her home. She thought him rather abrupt, and decided that he would not add greatly to the general amusement. Later, she modified this opinion, because, despite a severe appearance and the slight awkwardness he displayed on entering, he proved an excellent conversationalist.

He was a tall man in the early thirties, rather thin, with a clever face, and light keen, extraordinarily penetrating eyes. By profession he was a mining engineer, and Arnett had described him as a particularly smart man at his job. He had met him in Cape Town before his marriage, and had run across him again that day unexpectedly after the lapse of years. The invitation to dinner had been prompted by impulse; he had no particular feeling of friendship for the man.

Dare, who was often in Cape Town, was acquainted with some of the guests present. The Carruthers, who were neighbours of the Arnetts, and with whom Pamela was on terms of greater intimacy than with the majority of her large circle of friends, had known him for years. Mrs Carruthers had once thought of marrying him before she met Carruthers, misled by a certain deferential kindness he displayed towards all women, being naturally fond of the

sex, into thinking he cared for her. She still flirted mildly with him on the occasions when they met; but she had grown out of the belief that her marriage mattered to him.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she remarked, when he sought her out after dinner and suggested a stroll in the grounds. "I did not think you knew the Arnotts."

"I knew Arnott years ago, before he was married," he answered.

"Then you haven't met her before? ... They've been married five years."

"So long ago as that, was it?" he observed meditatively. "She is very sweet looking."

"Yes; she is pretty," Mrs Carruthers allowed. "They are the most devoted couple in the Peninsula."

"What's amiss between you and Dick?" he asked.

"Oh!" she laughed. "I never worshipped Dickie quite so blindly as that. The Arnotts' is the only case of perennial courtship I've ever been privileged to witness... But after all five years is but a step of the journey."

"I should think a man could continue in love indefinitely with a woman like Mrs Arnott," he remarked.

"If time stood still for her, perhaps," she conceded. "But she won't always be pretty."

"She will always be sweet," he returned. "I don't set great store by looks myself. But I like a woman to be amiable; and a sweet expression suggests a sweet disposition."

"It may suggest it; it doesn't necessarily prove that it's there."

"Leave me a few of my pleasant beliefs," he pleaded. "It's an old-fashioned notion, but I like to think that the world is a good place, and human nature on the whole inclined to charity. It's a much more comfortable theory than the deliberately cultivated scepticism towards the disinterestedness of human motives. I like to think that what looks sweet, is sweet; just as I like to believe that when a woman is kind to me it is because she feels kindly. That is why I always enjoy being with you."

"By which subtle flattery you force me to sheathe my claws, and make an effort towards being amiable. You haven't altered much."

"Nor have you," he returned, smiling. "And amiability being one of your many admirable qualities, the effort you propose making on my behalf won't cost you much."

Since the time of year was unsuited to sitting indoors, the Arnotts had had the grounds lighted, and engaged some musicians to play at intervals during the evening. Pamela, who possessed a very fine contralto voice, sang once towards the finish of the evening, standing on the brilliantly lighted stoep outside the drawing-room windows, a fair, radiant, girlish figure, singing with extraordinary passion that seductive song from Saint-Saëns' "Samson et Dalila," "*Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix.*"

Dare, a little apart from the rest, took up his position beside a tall bush of gardenias and listened with absorbed attention until the finish of the song, his keen eyes never leaving the singer's face, lost in a wondering rapture of admiration for the singer as much as for the song.

"*Ah! réponds à ma tendresse...*"

The seductive words, the seductive tones, thrilled him. He was Samson listening to Delilah,—a Delilah sweet and charming and womanly, without the sting of poison in her passionate entreating.

When the song ended he still remained motionless, not joining in the applause which followed, heedless of everything about him, conscious only of one fair girlish face, of a pair of limpid eyes, blue as the African sky itself, and of the tender curve of sweet lips made for laughter. For five years he had been searching for this face, and he found it here—the centre jewel in another man's crown of happiness.

"*Her price is far above rubies; the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her; her children rise up and call her blessed...*" Involuntarily the words came to his mind with a sense of their appropriateness. Where had he heard them? He did not know. But assuredly they were written for her.

He turned his head and glanced at the people near him. With the finish of the song they had started talking again, carrying on the conversations which the music had interrupted. No one seemed to have been impressed, as he had been, with the moving power of the seductive voice. Possibly they had heard it often before: he heard it for the first time, and felt profoundly stirred.

When he looked round again she had moved away, and formed one of a gay group on the stoep. He waited until she left this group, then, when he saw her alone for a moment, he seized his chance and joined her. Her guests had been pressing her to sing again, but she declined. For some reason Dare was glad she refused. He wanted no other song, perhaps with an altogether different sentiment, to sweep away the emotions which the first song had produced in his soul. He was oddly stirred and excited, moved out of his ordinary calm by a sensuous love song finely rendered by a woman who was an artist, and yet surprisingly natural.

He did not compliment her on her singing. It was the obvious thing to do; but Dare seldom did the obvious. If he could have thanked her in his own way for the pleasure she had given, that would have been an altogether different

matter. But his way was not consistent with twentieth-century customs, nor was it practicable in the case of a married woman in the company of her husband and friends.

"I've been exploring your beautiful grounds, Mrs Arnott," he said. "What a delightful place you have here."

"Yes; isn't it?" returned Pamela, with ingenuous pride in her home. "I'm so glad you like it. I love it."

"I'm sure you must," he replied.

"You must come and see the garden in the day time," she added graciously. "From the lawn the view of the mountain is very fine,—if you admire the mountain. I never tire of watching it. It adapts itself to one's mood. Or perhaps I should say its varying aspects affect one's mood. I sit out there and study it for hours at a stretch."

"I should like to do that," he said.

"Well, you shall, if you care to. I like to share my mountain."

"Do you ever visit Johannesburg?" he asked.

"I haven't been there yet."

"You ought to," he said. "It is an interesting city. There are some nice homes there, too—and gardens."

"You have a good garden, I suppose?" Pamela said. "You must have, because you appreciate them."

"Ah! there are plenty of things which I appreciate that I haven't got," he replied. "I am a bachelor, and live at hotels—when I'm above ground," he added with a smile. "A fairly unenviable existence, eh?"

"Why not change all that, and marry?" she suggested.

He regarded her contemplatively for a second, and then looked deliberately away.

"I don't fancy I belong to the marrying sort," he said.

"Oh, nonsense!" returned Pamela brightly. "Every one is the marrying sort when he meets the right person."

"Yes! Then I imagine the right person hasn't revealed herself."

"You should go in search of her," she said.

"I did once—five years ago."

"Yes?" Pamela looked at him with a gleam of feminine interest in her deep eyes. "Five years ago you went in search of her... And then?..."

"She had run away," he said, "and was married to some one else."

"Oh!" Her voice had a disappointed ring. This that she was hearing was altogether the wrong kind of a finish to an interesting romance. "Then she wasn't the right person after all."

"She was for me," he replied with quiet conviction. "But, you see, both sides have a voice in these matters."

"But if she didn't care for you, she couldn't have been the right person," she insisted. "Believe me, the right person is waiting somewhere."

"In that case," he said lightly, "when we meet I shall doubtless recognise her. I won't give her the chance to run away a second time. A man who is dilatory in his love affairs deserves to spend his days underground and his nights in hotels. I'm not complaining."

Suddenly she laughed.

"I don't believe you are the least bit in earnest," she observed. "You are one of these contradictory people who look serious, and are always laughing at life."

He scrutinised the smiling face with added interest.

"I don't as a rule take life seriously," he returned,—“and a very good rule too. If I am not mistaken, Mrs Arnott, it is a rule you practise yourself.”

"I don't know about that," Pamela said in her bright, young voice. "I take each day as it comes, and make the most of it. That's the best way, really."

"For you, perhaps," he answered. "But some of us would have a dull time if we had no to-morrow in contemplation. I have no quarrel with to-day, for instance; but there are days in my life I could cheerfully wipe off the calendar."

"There used to be those kind of days in my life once," she rejoined. She looked up at him, smiling, so radiant in her gladness that he was forced to smile in sympathy with it. "They make the present so much jollier," she said.

"You enjoy by comparison," he returned.

"I suppose that's it—in a way; yes. When you have followed my advice you will do that too."

"The same prescription doesn't fit every case," he ventured.

"It doesn't cure every complaint," she allowed; "but it will cure yours."

"Mine being?" he asked with an uplift of the brows.

"Loneliness."

He laughed at this diagnosis, and Pamela laughed with him.

"No woman ought to prescribe for that complaint," he said, "unless she is prepared to provide the remedy."

"Ah! the patient has to find that for himself."

"And suppose it happens to be out of his reach?—suppose it runs away?"

Pamela looked thoughtful.

"There's an endless supply of the remedy always at hand," she returned presently.

"That's merely another version of the fishes in the sea," he answered. "But when I've shaped my appetite to sole, mackerel is no substitute. I've hauled in my line... I think you might have offered more original advice than that," he added, slightly aggrieved.

"I wash my hands of your case," she said. "You aren't needing advice. You are entirely satisfied with your life as it is."

"Yes," he agreed. "I am borrowing a leaf from your book and enjoying the now."

Chapter Three.

The following afternoon Dare called upon Pamela, and was glad to find her at home and alone. He was returning the next day to Johannesburg, he explained, and was not likely to be in Cape Town again for some time.

Pamela entertained him in the garden, and gave him tea under the trees on the lawn. She expressed regret for her husband's absence: he had motored into town, and would not be home before seven.

"He will be so sorry to miss you," she said. "You had better stay and dine with us."

He thanked her, but declined the invitation, pleading a prior engagement. The absence of Arnott occurred to him as rather an agreeable accident; Mrs Arnott's sole company was sufficient for his enjoyment.

She chatted inconsequently while she poured out the tea, and he watched her, and admired again, as he had admired on the previous night, the sweet expression of her face, her air of joyous youth. In the daylight she was less radiantly pretty than she had appeared by artificial light; possibly, he decided, evening dress was more becoming to her than day-wear; but she was fair enough in any guise to excite admiration. Dare would have admired her sweet expression had she been otherwise plain of feature; it was in his opinion beautiful of itself.

"Do you know, I've seen you before last night," he said, as he stirred his tea, and contemplated her gravely across the little table that was drawn up beside her chair.

"Seen me before?" she repeated, surprised. "Where?"

"Were you ever in Port Elizabeth?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. I was teaching there. But that was five years ago."

"I saw you there," he answered,—"five years ago."

Pamela's blue eyes opened wide. She scrutinised him closely, and shook her head.

"I don't remember," she said.

"You wouldn't," he replied. He helped himself to cake, and resumed in a careless manner: "It was at a tennis tournament. You were in the stand, and I was playing in the men's singles."

"Did you win?" she asked.

He smiled.

"No; I played rottenly. I came in defeated, and sat in the stand near you."

"If you had won," she said, "I might possibly have noticed you."

"It would be kinder," he said, "if you spared defeat a few of your glances. You shook hands with the winner."

"How horrid of me!" she cried.

"Oh! well, he was a P.E. man. I expect you were pleased he carried off the honours. I had to go back immediately; I went by the night train. Soon afterwards I was back in Port Elizabeth. I didn't see you on that occasion."

Pamela looked away from him, and gazed thoughtfully above the trees at the mountain which towered high above them, blue in the afternoon sunlight, with dark purple shadows in its cleft sides that deepened into black.

"I married just about that time," she said.

"So I heard."

She glanced at him curiously.

"You seem to have known quite a lot about me," she said. "It's funny hearing all this now."

"Yes," he agreed. "Odd to have run up against you like this! I knew you again at once."

"You have a good memory for faces," she observed. "I feel I ought to have recognised you."

"Ah! but I was defeated," he reminded her smilingly,—“defeated all round. And there was no reason why you should have noticed a stranger particularly. They were pretty well all strange faces to me, you see; and I was amusing myself by picking out a few. It's a habit of mine. I fix on a face and construct a story in connection with it."

"Did you construct a story about me?"

"I forget," he returned evasively. "Quite possibly I did... But it was entirely wrong, anyway. When a man constructs a story in connection with a girl's face, he doesn't provide her with a lover, unless—"

"Unless?" prompted Pamela. She was faintly amused with the halting recital which showed a tendency to break off at the most interesting points. She glanced at him with a laugh in her eyes, and repeated encouragingly: "Unless?"

"Well, the answer is fairly obvious," he replied, smiling too. "Do you want me to go on?"

"No," she said, and flushed and looked away again, but the laughter was still in her eyes. "I think I can imagine the rest."

"It shouldn't require a great mental strain," he returned.

"If you amuse yourself in that fashion," Pamela remarked, "what a lot of exciting adventures you can contrive."

"Make-believe adventures of that nature aren't exciting," he said. "They're the last word in dulness really,—the substitute for the real thing. Sitting talking with you here is infinitely pleasanter than weaving impossible romances. Certainly, when one is stage-managing, one can have things all one's own way; but it's a bloodless form of amusement."

"Do you still visit Port Elizabeth—for the tennis tournament?" she asked.

"No; that defeat of mine sickened me. I've done with competing. It's the younger men's turn now."

Pamela looked amused.

"You are very easily discouraged," she said. "I don't think I altogether admire that easy acquiescence in failure: it's not a British characteristic."

"Perhaps not," he allowed. "But when one has suffered the knock-out blow it's idiotic to enter the ring again."

At this junction Pamela's little girl, eluding her coloured nurse, ran across the lawn towards her mother, having espied the tea-table from afar. In her eagerness for cake she overlooked the stranger, until abruptly made aware of his presence as she hurled her plump body into Pamela's arms. The sight of the strange man sobered her gladness with surprising suddenness. The bright head dropped swiftly, and the flushed, shy little face buried itself in Pamela's dress.

Dare smiled. There was no doubt as to the child's identity; Pamela the second was Pamela the first in miniature.

"Somebody's come for cake," said Pamela, and tried to lift the hidden face from its resting place; but the child resisted her attempts.

"And somebody's got a nasty shock," Dare added, as he cut a slice of the most tempting dainty on the table and held it out invitingly. "Won't you come and make friends?"

But Pamela the second merely peeped at him like a shy, inquisitive bird, and nestled closer in the sheltering arms. Experience, in the form of her father, had led her to be distrustful of men.

"See, Pamela," coaxed her mother; "Mr Dare has a beautiful slice of cake for you. See!"

"Don't want it," Pamela pouted.

"But that's rude," remarked Pamela the first. "You mustn't be naughty."

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Dare. "You only prejudice my chances." He leaned over her chair, and placed the slice of cake in

the chubby hand which opened and closed upon it shyly. "I'm awfully fond of cake too, Pamela," he said. "You eat that piece, and I'll eat a piece; and we'll see who gets through first."

"You'll ruin her digestion," Pamela the elder observed with smiling reproof, while Pamela the younger set her small teeth in the cake and munched it with evident appreciation. While she ate, she kept a suspicious but interested eye on the stranger, who was eating cake also with apparent whole-hearted enjoyment. To Pamela the second's delight the stranger's slice failed to disappear as rapidly as her own.

"You've won," he cried, as the last mouthful was crammed with unfair haste upon its unmasticated predecessor.

Pamela the second licked her small fingers and laughed because the stranger was beaten and looked so sorry about it too. She hoped he was going to cry.

"Let's try again," he suggested, and cut a second and smaller slice.

Pamela scrambled down from her mother's lap and approached near to him, leaning with her small sticky hands on his knees, and her greedy blue eyes on the cake.

"Try again!" she repeated delightedly, and held out an eager hand.

"It is just as well," remarked Pamela the first, "that this doesn't happen often."

She met his eyes over the child's bright head and returned their quiet smile. In making his bid for baby favours he was gaining more than he guessed. Before the second piece of cake was finished, Pamela the second was seated on his knee; and because he was badly beaten this time also, and seemed to mind his defeat even more than before, she rested her head contentedly against his sleeve, and evinced entire satisfaction at his expressions of disappointment. Pamela the second was hard-hearted and crowed loudly over her success.

"I think you may claim to have won this time," said Pamela the first, watching the child's friendly response to his overtures with pleased, surprised eyes.

He caught the reference.

"Through another defeat," he said, "yes."

"It is a greater victory than you imagine," she added. "I have never known her won over by your sex before. You are accustomed to children?"

"Not accustomed,—little people don't come my way; but I'm in sympathy with them. My tastes are infantile, you see."

He rose shortly afterwards and took his departure. Pamela the second had gone off in pursuit of other diversion: Pamela the first accompanied him to the gate.

"I am sorry you are going back so soon," she said as she shook hands with him. "I don't feel as though we were new acquaintances. I seem to know you quite well."

"Five years," he returned... "I regard the friendship as dating from then. We are quite old friends really."

"It's odd," she said, and laughed. "I am going to adopt your view. If you have known me for five years, it stands to reason that I must have known you too. Good-bye. Be sure to look us up when you come this way again."

He looked into her eyes with a protracted, earnest gaze, and hesitated.

"I don't know when that will be," he answered slowly. "I don't anticipate coming this way again for some while. When I do, you may be very sure of one thing,—that I shall look you up."

Pamela went back to her seat under the trees, and thought about him for the rest of the afternoon. There was something—she could not define it satisfactorily—in the man's personality that attracted her: she had never met any one before with whom she had felt so quickly at home. He was companionable and sympathetic. The odd mixture of serio-comic in his conversation left her slightly in doubt as to the entire sincerity of all he said; but this only further piqued her interest. It was possible to imagine him clothing in flippant language his deepest feelings with a view to disguising their earnestness. She could not conceive him ever betraying emotion. Abruptly she roused herself with a laugh, and consulted the watch at her wrist.

"Seven o'clock!" she mused. "A nice thing for a married woman to devote nearly two hours in a sentimental reverie about a stranger!"

She went indoors to change her dress. Arnott returned while she was upstairs. She heard him go to his dressing-room, and after a while he crossed the landing to her room, hesitated at the door, and finally entered. She observed that he was looking worried again. He appeared excited and irritable, and a restlessness most unusual in him kept him constantly on the move. He fingered things on the dressing-table, and brushed aside impatiently any article that came in his way.

Pamela wondered what it was that worried him so of late, but she did not like to question him. This worry harassed him usually on mail days. She was beginning to connect the trouble with his English letters. But for the fact that he never showed any anxiety with regard to their expenses, she would have concluded that he was financially embarrassed. But not once had he suggested to her that it would be wise to practise economy. He was, as a matter

of fact, far more extravagant than she was. He spent money with the careless indifference of a man whose banking account more than sufficed for his needs.

“Mr Dare called this afternoon,” remarked Pamela, watching her husband as he fidgeted at her dressing-table. “He leaves Cape Town to-morrow. I thought you might like to see him, so I asked him to dine.”

He faced round abruptly and stared at her, frowning and displeased.

“He isn’t coming,” she added, meeting his vexed gaze, and feeling for the first time glad that Dare had refused the invitation. “He was engaged for to-night.”

“I’m not sorry,” he said, looking immeasurably relieved. “I’d rather have a quiet evening with you, Pam. Last night tired me; I’m feeling cheap.”

“It was thoughtless of me to have asked him,” said Pamela contritely. “But it’s all right, as it happens. We’ll have a Darby and Joan dinner, and you shall be as surly as you please, and sit and smoke all the evening. There.”

He pinched her ear.

“I’ll take you at your word one of these days; and you’ll see what a bear I can be.”

Pamela slipped her hand through his arm and they left the bedroom together. Although she had made a joke of the quiet evening they would spend, she knew quite well that he would sit as she had promised he should, silent and abstracted, so lost in gloomy thought that he would seem oblivious of her presence. She had seen him in this mood frequently of late, and had grown familiar with the symptoms.

At dinner, quietly observant of him, she noticed that he ate scarcely anything; but he drank more than usual. When he exceeded his customary allowance, it did not loosen his tongue; he became morosely silent, and betrayed a tendency towards irritability if spoken to. Pamela was a tactful woman, and knew when to be silent. But she was beginning to resent her husband’s want of confidence in her. If there was a secret worry that pressed upon his mind so that it threatened to become a serious trouble, he ought to share it with her. His silence showed a lack of trust. Surely by now he ought to realise that her love was sufficiently strong to help her to understand and sympathise with him in any trouble that might overtake him. She desired to share his full confidence, to have the strength of her love put to the test. There was no shadow of doubt in her own mind that it would rise to meet any occasion. A love which is entirely strong has no fear of the fire.

“To-morrow,” she told herself, and stilled a cowardly impulse to put the date further off, “when he is more himself, I will ask him to trust me.”

Then she got up quietly, moved to the back of his chair, and kissed him on his forehead. He made no direct response, but his eyes, as they followed her from the room, were alight with a passionate hunger that quenched in its fiercer fire the slightly furtive expression of dread which marred their ordinary frankness.

Chapter Four.

The morning found Arnott recovered from his overnight depression; and Pamela’s determination to inquire into things was less positive than on the previous evening. On reflection she decided to wait a little longer. Perhaps if she waited he would broach the matter himself. It might be that she was exaggerating the importance of this thing. In any case she would exercise patience and see what the next mail day brought forth; if his letters caused him annoyance again she would ask him to confide in her the nature of this worry which, while not allowed to share it, was becoming her trouble too. She could not look on and see him bothered without feeling bothered in a measure also; and her entire ignorance as to the nature of the trouble was worrying of itself.

Pamela held modern ideas as to a wife’s right to share her husband’s confidence. Marriage unless a mental as well as a physical union was no marriage in her opinion. She desired to face life at her husband’s side, and take all that it offered fearlessly, the bad as well as the good. It had been all good up to the present; but no sky is always cloudless: eternal sunshine would dry up the generous fountains of life, as unbroken happiness will narrow the sympathies and shrivel the best emotions of the heart. Pamela had a healthy appreciation of the blue skies, but she was not in the least afraid of the rain. So long as she had her husband’s love, so long as they were together, she believed that she could meet any trouble, bear any sorrow bravely in the strengthening knowledge of his great love for her.

So long as they were together... She dwelt on that thought, smiling and confident. They were together, that was very certain; it seemed equally certain that nothing could happen to separate them. It was indeed such an assured impossibility that she encouraged herself to consider it for the pleasure of proving its absurdity. Herbert, himself, had declared that only death could divide them; and at twenty-six death looms very indistinct along the vista of years.

Wandering in the garden, waiting for her husband who was going to motor her out to Sea Point, Pamela speculated on these things with the easy optimism natural to her, and indulged the happy conceit of creating purely imaginary and highly impossible situations for the satisfaction of filling them effectively,—a habit of make-believe which endured from schoolroom days. The appearance of the postman in the drive awoke her from her dreaming to the realisation that the morning was slipping away. Something must be detaining Herbert, possibly something to do with the car.

She took the letters from the postman and went indoors. One of the letters was for herself. It was addressed to her in her name before she married, the name she had neither signed nor seen written for five years. It puzzled her that the writer of the letter should be familiar with her present address and yet be ignorant of her change of name. She could

not recall having seen the handwriting before. The postmark was London. It was doubtless due to the mistake in the name on the envelope that the letter had not found its way into Arnott's box at the post office, and so have been collected by him when he fetched his own letters on the previous evening.

She went into the sitting-room, and seated herself near the window, and turned the envelope about in her hands. Failing to identify her correspondent from the superscription, she finally opened it, and withdrawing the closely written sheet of foreign paper, glanced first at the signature. "Lucy Arnott" was written in clear, firm characters at the foot of the page.

Pamela's amazement was unbounded. Who was Lucy Arnott? And why should a connection of her husband address her as Miss Horton? She concluded that it must be a connection of her husband; it was such an unlikely accident that a stranger of the same name would write to her.

Curious, and vaguely troubled, Pamela began to read. She read the letter through, read with white, set face, and a mind which failed to grasp the significance of what the cold, formal phrases expressed with perfect lucidity. It occurred to her that the thing was a cruel hoax, a wicked, malicious lie. She could not credit the truth of the writer's assertion that she was Herbert Arnott's lawful wife, and that therefore Pamela was not a wife at all—was not legally married...

Pamela tried to realise this abomination, and then thrust the horror from her as too terrible for credence. It could not be. She knew that she was married. She had her marriage certificate. Everything had been done in order. Whoever Lucy Arnott was, she could not disprove that.

"I don't know," the writer said, "whether you were aware of my existence when you consented to pose as Herbert's wife. I only heard recently that he was living with a wife at Wynberg; therefore I cannot judge whether you have been deceived, or are simply a willing accomplice. If it is a case of deception, you have my sympathy; if the latter, you will not need, and would not appreciate, it. I may state at once, in the event of your cherishing the hope that I will divorce him, that I have no intention of doing so. I have no respect for the divorce laws, which are man-made and for their own convenience, and I have no wish to have my name dragged before the public. I shall take no proceedings against Herbert; it is a matter of entire indifference to me what he does, or how he lives. After this letter you will not hear from me again. Having informed you of what I felt it right you should know, I leave it to you to act as your conscience dictates. If, as I am inclined to fear from a too intimate knowledge of Herbert's character, you have been cruelly duped, you may, if you stand in need of a friend, count on me as a woman who has suffered also at the same hands and can therefore feel for another."

Pamela sat with the letter in her lap and stared at the page unseeingly. A little choking sound escaped her; it was scarcely a sob, more nearly it resembled a catching of the breath. She made no other sound.

For a long while she sat there motionless, holding the letter in her lap between her limp, shaking hands. It wasn't true... It couldn't be true... This thought reiterated itself persistently in her bewildered mind; but behind the thought, companioning it always, a doubt chilled her unbelief in the writer's veracity,—a doubt which came, and came again, until finally it asserted its right to a place in her thoughts; and instead of the reiterated: It can't be true, the phrase shaped itself: Suppose this thing were true? Suppose this were the secret worry which had troubled Herbert's peace of late...

And then suddenly she heard his voice calling her name, and, looking up, saw him advancing towards her along the stoep. He was looking hot and slightly out of humour. He had taken off his cap in order to cool his brow; he carried it in his hand.

"It's no go, Pam," he said; "the drive is off for this morning. There is something wrong with the engine. It's beyond me; the car will have to go into town for repair."

He came up to the window, and stood in the aperture, and gazed at her in surprise. Never had he seen Pamela wear such a look as she wore then. Her face was white; the blue eyes, dilated and dark with pain, stared back into his own with the dazed, unseeing look of a sleep-walker. For the moment he believed she was ill; and he stepped through the window hurriedly and bent over her with anxious solicitude.

"Pam!" he said... "My dear, what is it?"

Then his eyes fell on the letter in her hands, and his face reddened and then went very white. It was evident that the handwriting was perfectly familiar to him.

Pamela put the letter into his hand.

"Read it," she said dully.

"Good God!" he cried, and turned the thing he held in hands only a little less unsteady than her own. "How did you get hold of this?"

"It came by the post—just now."

"Damn!" he muttered under his breath, and read the letter deliberately. When he had read it he crushed it in his palm and thrust it into his pocket.

"I would have died sooner than you had read this," he said.

He made no attempt, she observed, to refute the charge. Somehow she had not expected him to; from the moment when his eye had fallen upon the letter she realised that the information contained in it was true. His first wife was

not dead.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she said. She looked at him resentfully with her darkened, pain-filled eyes. "It wasn't fair to me... You've cheated me... You—Oh!"

She broke off piteously, and looked away from him out through the window; and he saw that she was weeping. The tears ran down her cheeks, and splashed unheeded on the hands that lay clenched in her lap and made no move to check the bitter rain. Arnott turned his eyes from the piteous face.

"I couldn't tell you," he muttered... "I loved you. I dared not risk losing you,—and I believed you would never know."

"It's—bigamy," she said, and caught her breath again sharply.

"Yes."

His voice was sullen.

"But that's punishable," Pamela said, and scrutinised him with wide, distressed eyes... "Isn't it?"

"Yes."

He made a sudden movement. Before she could stay him he was on his knees beside her, with his arms about her, holding her closely.

"I wanted you so badly," he said. "It was the only way. Oh! Pamela, believe me, I never meant to hurt you... I never meant you to know. My dear—Oh! my dear, don't turn from me. Forget that you've read that letter,—forget that you ever received it. Let things be as they were before."

"But they can't be," she insisted. "I'm not—"

She broke off and stared at him, frightened and dismayed.

"I'm not even *married*," she added, the horror of this truth revealing itself in her tones.

"You are," he asserted sullenly. "I married you..."

"But you couldn't," she persisted, "with your wife alive. The law can punish you for bigamy."

"Do you want the law to punish me?" he asked.

"No," she said. "That wouldn't help me. And... there's the child."

He frowned.

"You are distressing yourself unnecessarily, Pamela," he said. "There is no difference really. You felt quite secure until to-day. Your position is as assured now as it ever was. You are more my wife than the woman who wrote that letter. She has a legal right to my name; but we were never mated as you and I are. My first marriage was a bitter mistake which I have ceased to consider long ago. She stands for nothing in my life. You are everything to me—everything. I'd fight to keep you with my last breath."

"You ought not to have done it," Pamela said, and wrung her hands. He put his hand over hers and stayed her. "You ought to have left me in peace... What peace is there for me now? Any hour this thing may come out. It's not our secret,—yours and mine alone."

"It's yours and mine and hers," he said. "She won't speak."

"How can you be sure?" Pamela cried passionately. "She told me."

"Yes—damn her!" he returned, and stood up abruptly. "She has been threatening to do that for months. But I thought I could intercept the letter. I never dreamed of her writing to you like this... But she has done what she meant to. She will be silent now."

"But things can't go on as they have been," Pamela said piteously. "I can't stay here, now I *know*. I—Don't you see, Herbert?—it wouldn't be right. I should feel—"

She shivered suddenly, and broke down again and wept bitterly.

"Oh, dear heaven!" she wailed. "What am I to do?"

"Do you mean," he said in a hard voice, "that you think of leaving me?" Then, his calmness deserting him, he went to her and took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly. "Pamela," he whispered brokenly, "what I have done, I did out of love for you. It may be that I did you a wrong in marrying you; but,—to give you up! ... I couldn't. Oh! my dearest, believe me, I have fought hard... I fought against my love for you; but it was too strong; it broke down every barrier. It would have broken me if I could not have had you... Dearest, speak to me... Tell me that you forgive me,—that you'll stick to me. You can't leave me, Pam,—you can't leave me. My dear, I couldn't let you go."

Pamela freed herself from his embrace, and sat bade looking at him with her miserable tear-blurred eyes. She put up a hand and swept the hair back from her brow.

"It wouldn't be right," she said, and stirred restlessly... "I don't know... I must think."

She got up and passed him and walked towards the door. He made no attempt to stop her.

"I want to be alone," she said slowly... "I want to think..."

She passed out, and the man, rising also and looking after her, stood with a heavy frown darkening his face, his shaking hand pulling nervously at his moustache. The blow which he had so long dreaded had fallen like a thunderbolt and threatened to destroy his home. He could not feel sure how Pamela would act now that she knew the truth. Of her love for him he had no shadow of a doubt; but women like Pamela possessed scruples, queer principles of honour which hardened into obstinacy when the question of right manifested itself beyond all argument. When a thing became a matter of conscience with such women, it was all a toss up, he reflected, whether the woman will not deliberately sacrifice herself to her sense of equity. That as a general rule on smaller matters she is less sensitive in regard to points of honour, inclines her in moments of a serious decision to a greater severity. For the life of him he could not determine what Pamela would decide to do after reflection. The fact that she had insisted on thinking the thing out alone occurred to him as the first step in a moral victory which might spell disaster to the happiness of both.

Chapter Five.

Pamela spent the day locked in her room. She held no communication with any one. Arnott had no means of discovering how she was passing the time, because on the one occasion when he pleaded for admission she refused to open her door; and he went away troubled and sorely dissatisfied.

He left the house and did not return until evening.

When she saw him go Pamela had a mad impulse to seize the opportunity and escape from him, but she dismissed this idea almost immediately. To run away would be ridiculous: she was quite free to go at any time. And there was the child. The child was her child; it did not belong to its father. That was the one right of the unmarried mother. The child of the dishonoured union belongs as nature intended to the mother. Pamela began dimly to understand why Herbert had so hated the thought of having children; that at least was a point which counted in his favour.

She paced the room at intervals, walking restlessly between the window and the door; but for the greater part of the time she remained seated listlessly in a chair near the open window, staring out at the sunshine, thinking, thinking always, trying to resolve what she ought to do, what she intended doing. The matter rested now between those two points. She had no longer any real doubt as to what she ought to do. Every argument she advanced against taking the right step she recognised perfectly as a deliberate oversight of duty in the pursuit of her own happiness. She wanted him so. In despite of the wrong he had done her, she loved him passionately, with a love which attempted to excuse the injury because of the depth of feeling which had moved him to act as he had acted, which held him to her still in defiance of every law. He had sinned out of love for her. Was she too going to sin in order to keep him?

She realised perfectly that if she went out of his life now, though it might break her heart to leave him, though it would possibly break his, she would save from the wreckage her virtue, her self-respect; to continue to live with him, knowing what she knew, was to become an abandoned woman, a woman of loose morals, the wings of whose happiness would be clipped by the sense of her degradation. She would be a thing in the mire, soiled and ashamed,—Arnott's woman, no longer his wife...

She broke off in her reflections, weeping passionately.

"I couldn't bear it," she moaned. "I couldn't bear it."

Then, when she grew a little calmer, she faced the alternative. Life without him... never to see him again. To live in some place where her story was unknown,—to know that he was alive, in the world somewhere, hungry for her, aching for her, as she would ache for him,—and not be able to go to him,—never to see his face, nor hear his voice again,—never to feel the clasp of his arms, his kisses on her lips... Would that be more bearable than the other, she wondered, and shivered at a prospect so utterly bleak and forlorn that she could scarce dwell on it even in her thoughts. How could she face separation from him?—such a death in life for them both?

And then began again the struggle, the fight of the soul against the desire of the flesh...

That evening Pamela went downstairs. She dined with Herbert, or rather sat through the meal; she could not eat. Neither of them spoke much. Once Arnott insisted on her drinking a glass of wine. He had noticed her lack of appetite; and he poured the wine into her glass, and stood by her while she drank it. He was keenly observant of her, and careful not to let her see his attentive regard. He wondered whether she had arrived at any decision, whether she would speak about the matter later. He was feverishly anxious to know what was in her mind. If she was bent on leaving him, he was determined to oppose her to the utmost, to exert every art, every argument he could devise to induce her to alter her decision,—to see the thing from his point of view,—to be reasonable.

When she left the table, he rose also and followed her from the room. In the hall, at the foot of the stairs, she paused, glanced at him uncertainly, and changing her mind about going upstairs, entered the drawing-room. He followed her and shut the door.

"Tell me," he said, and stood facing her in the dull glow of the shaded lights, his voice trembling with emotion, body and features tense with the restraint he was bringing to bear on himself, to subdue the anxious desire to hear her speak, to hear her pronounce her verdict, to know the result of that long, miserable, mental struggle which he knew had been taking place in the bedroom from which she had shut him out,—“tell me what you have decided... I can't

bear this racking uncertainty any longer, Pamela... I can't bear it."

Pamela looked at him with perplexed, miserable eyes.

"I haven't decided," she said, "anything."

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears, there was a sound of tears in her voice.

"I don't know what to do," she moaned. "I've thought, and thought... I can't see a way out."

A momentary gleam of triumph leaped into his eyes. He held out his arms.

"My dear!" he said.

She made no move towards him. She leaned forward, resting her arms on the back of a chair, her gaze fixed on the carpet.

"There seems only one thing to do," she resumed in an expressionless voice... "There *is* only one thing,—no decent minded woman would consider any other course."

"You mean parting?" he said, and his face hardened.

"Yes,—parting," she echoed, and lifted her gaze and scrutinised him intently. "It won't undo the evil; but it sets things right, as far as it is possible to right them now."

"Look here!" he cried. He went to her and knelt on the chair upon which she leaned and looked up into her face... "Could you part from me? ... Could you? Think what we have been to one another,—all that our love has meant, and then think of being apart,—always,—never seeing one another even... *Could* you do it, Pam?"

Her troubled eyes met his, clouded with a mist of tears.

"Don't!" she muttered, and put a hand quickly to her throat. "I've been thinking about it—like that all day."

"And you can't face it!" he said. He laid a hand firmly upon hers where it rested upon the back of the chair. "My dear... you can't face it... I can't face it. I've looked at the matter all round; and I can't face parting now any better than I could face renunciation five years ago. It's out of the question. It can't be, Pamela. We've gone a long way beyond that."

"But the other thing,—to stay,—that's impossible too."

"No," he asserted. "That's the only thing left us. Except for the compunction I feel in the pain this knowledge has brought you, it hasn't altered anything for me. I'm trying to look at it from your point of view. The relative values of our position are not changed for me, you see. When you have recovered from the shock of the revelation, I'm hoping you will see things as I do. Nothing is altered really. I have regarded you always sacredly as my dear wife. You will ever remain so to me. Nothing can alter that."

"But I am not your wife," Pamela said. "Do you think I can ever forget that, now I know? Every time that my eyes meet yours that thought will be in my mind... not you wife,—only your—"

"Don't say it," he said sharply, and gripped her hand hard. "You are my wife." He spoke with a certain obstinacy, as though his purpose were to insist on her imagination taking hold of realities which she sought to overlook, which were none the less realities to him because he justified them by his own standard in defiance of conventional law.

"I'm not going to give you up, Pamela. I'm going to keep you. If you left me I should follow you. Don't you see that parting for us is impossible? If we loved less it might be easy to talk of parting,—easy to assume a smug respectability, and give up a little for the satisfaction of feeling virtuous. But people don't give up everything for the sake of virtue—and to part now would be giving up everything for you and me."

"But I can't," she insisted, "continue to live here—as your wife. It's not only a case of conscience, it's a matter of self-respect. I should *hate* myself."

This was a fresh issue. He had not foreseen this, and he realised his inadequacy to grasp the point; it was too intrinsically feminine for his understanding. He stared at her in baffled perplexity.

"Do you mean," he began, and paused, scrutinising her tortured face with disconcerted, incredulous eyes.

He stood up, and moved away from her, and remained with his back to her, facing the window. Then abruptly he faced round again.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, his nerves on edge with the intolerable strain. "For God's sake, be reasonable! I can't stand this any longer. Do you mean that you want to leave me?"

Pamela made no answer. She bent forward and leaned her face in her hands and broke into bitter weeping. In a moment he was beside her. He took her in his arms, and drew her head down to his breast, and held her so, still sobbing, with her face hidden in her hands. Tenderly he kissed the bright hair.

"Poor little woman!" he said.

She clung to him, sobbing and weeping in his embrace.

"Oh! I can't," she wailed... "I can't."

Again the light of victory shone in the man's eyes. He held her more closely.

"No," he said; "we couldn't do it... Never to meet again! ... We couldn't do it, dear."

She drew back from his embrace and, seating herself in the chair, continued to weep hopelessly. He fell on his knees beside her.

"I'm a brute to have brought this on you," he muttered. "But I loved you so... Dearest heart, say you forgive me."

He caught her wrists and pulled her hands from her face and kissed the tear-drenched eyes.

"Pamela, my darling, forgive me. I meant no harm to you. I never meant you to know."

She regarded him with brimming eyes.

"Oh! I wish," she said, "that I didn't love you so well."

He kissed her hands. He had won in this first struggle. With patience, he told himself, he would recover the whole ground.

For an hour Pamela remained with him, talking the matter threadbare. Arnott did most of the talking; Pamela listened, acquiescing by her silence to much that he urged in his own defence, occasionally interrupting him, more occasionally disputing a point. Gradually he worked round to the subject of their future relations. On this point Pamela was more difficult. She held views of her own in regard to that; and the discussion at times took a bitter tone. He pleaded, he argued eloquently, he even offered concessions. He was patient and displayed a tender consideration which moved her to a corresponding tenderness, but did not shake her resolve.

They were still at cross purposes when, heavy with fatigue and misery, she arose and announced her intention of going to bed. The discussion, he recognised, would have to be postponed to some future time. This exasperated him; he left that the delay minimised his chances of victory. Further wrestling with her conscience might confirm her in her resolution, would inevitably make persuasion more difficult. Ultimate victory depended largely on his success in wearing down her scruples before they had time to harden into a conviction of duty.

He eyed her resentfully, and bit his lip to keep back the sharp words of reproach which came to his tongue.

The puritanical strain in the composition of a good woman was the most baffling factor to cope with; the element of passion became a weak, a futile argument against its frigid strength.

"You are punishing me heavily, Pamela," he said.

She turned towards him slowly. Her sad eyes dwelt for a long moment on his face and then looked deliberately away.

"My dear, I am not wishing to punish," she said. "It is equally hard for me."

"Then why..." he began, and paused, irresolute and almost ungovernably angry. "It's monstrous," he muttered. "Absurd! We might as well be apart altogether."

Pamela made no response, but went with a dragging step out of the room, up the stairs to the bedroom where she had spent the tragic hours of that weary day.

When he was alone, Arnott moved to a chair and seated himself, and remained lost in a gloomy reverie, his sombre gaze fixed sullenly on the floor. The hand of the clock revolved slowly twice round the dial before he roused himself from his bitter reflections. He saw no way out of this muddle. If Pamela persisted in her present attitude it meant the end of their happiness together; her daily presence in his home under the conditions she imposed would prove merely an aggravation.

Arnott's nature was passionate, and his love for Pamela was of the quality that refuses to be subdued. He had never practised restraint; the thought was intolerable. The fever of desire which had led to his bigamous marriage still fired his blood, and moved him to passionate rebellion against Pamela's decree. He refused to submit to this cold-blooded arrangement. He would have it out with her; he would overcome her scruples; he would,—he must win.

He got up, switched off the lights in the room, and passed out into the hall. He switched off the hall light also, and went up the darkened stairs. From beneath the door of Pamela's room a thin line of light told him that she was awake. He fancied he heard a movement inside the room, and listened. Then deliberately he advanced and tried the door. It was locked.

He gritted his teeth, and passed on and entered his dressing-room. For that night at least he had to admit defeat. Oddly, at the moment, though smarting with indignation at being thus determinedly denied admittance, he respected her decision, even while bitterly opposed to it,—he respected her.

He sat on the edge of his bed and beat softly on the carpet with his foot. A tormenting desire for her gripped him, as it had not gripped him since the days before he had married her—those days when he had recognised how impossible it was for him to do without her, when finally he had flung every consideration aside and gone through the form of a marriage, which he knew was no marriage, because he could not give her up. His need of her now was every whit as insistent as it had been then. Its very urgency had broken down every law, razed every barrier: it should, he told himself, surmount also this new obstacle which fate had flung in his path.

Chapter Six.

They were difficult days which followed. Pamela went about as usual, but she looked white and worn, and evidences of sleepless nights and much weeping disfigured her eyes. Arnott, unequal to the tension, decided on a brief separation, and took a trip round the coast. His absence—it was the first time he had gone away without her since their marriage—might bring home to her some realisation of what life would be like if they finally parted. Perhaps, when she was alone, when she missed his actual presence, she would relent. If, when he returned, he found her still obdurate he would broach the subject of a more complete separation.

He did not seriously believe that she would bring herself to the point of parting irrevocably. As things were, it was more difficult to part now than it would have been in the first shock of revelation. She had had time in which to adjust her mind to the altered conditions, to be called upon to readjust it, to do so late what she had felt she ought to have done at the beginning, and had failed to do, would add a fresh humiliation to the former difficulty, would make the difficulty greater. He felt fairly convinced that she would not willingly leave him, and he meant to force her into compliance by holding out this suggestion as the only possible alternative.

Pamela received the news of his intended departure with a sense of relief. She too had felt the strain to be well nigh intolerable, more so in view of his increased kindness and consideration for her, which made it so terribly difficult to refuse to listen to his pleading. She welcomed the thought of his absence as a relief from the constant pain and embarrassment of his reproachful presence; but when he was gone she missed him, missed him so sorely that she experienced, as he had hoped she would, a sort of terror at the idea of living without him. Almost it seemed to her that the talked-of separation had actually taken place, that he had gone away from her finally, that she would never see him again. A fear took hold of her imagination that he might have gone with the intention of not returning, that this might be his way of avoiding further distresses. Perhaps he would write and inform her that he had chosen this means as the best solution of the problem. He had not, she recalled, made any mention of returning. He had stated simply that he couldn't stand it, that he must get away. And she had accepted this without questioning, had felt glad that he should go. She no longer felt glad: she only wanted him back.

An aching sense of loneliness oppressed her as the days passed and brought no letter from him. She had expected to hear from him when the boat reached Algoa Bay. He sent no word until he was as far as Durban, then he wrote briefly that he was going on further up the coast. She had no knowledge of his movements after that. He did not write again.

In the weeks which followed she had ample time for reflection, time in which to determine her future course of action. She spent long hours in the garden revolving things in her mind, trying to disentangle thoughts and emotions and impulses of right and wrong, trying to sift them and get them into some consecutive order. And always she worked back to the one impassable point, the point which his absence made so distressingly clear, that life apart from him was a sheer impossibility. She could not face it. The long lonely years...

And yet to continue to live with him! ... That were to choose evil deliberately. And all their life together would be a lie, —an outward respectability which at any moment was liable to exposure for the sham it was.

From the bottom of her heart she wished that she might have remained in ignorance of this horrible truth. Then the responsibility of choice would not have been hers. She wanted to keep her happiness and her peace of mind, and that was now impossible. She wanted to continue as Herbert's wife, and yet remain virtuous; and she could not; her happiness or her virtue must be sacrificed, the one for the other.

Pamela prayed for strength and guidance, but her prayers held—as the prayers of many people hold—reservations. She attempted to bargain for the retention of her happiness. She asked to be shown the path of duty clearly, and when it was revealed to her she shut her eyes. There is never great difficulty in seeing the road which is called Duty; it shows always direct and straight ahead; but many people turn their backs on it and look in the opposite direction, because the path of duty is an uphill path, and it is not until one has reached the summit that one can appreciate the fairness of the prospect and the exhilarating freshness of the air. Pamela stood in the valley, and the steepness and the loneliness of the ascent appalled her. Hers was not a nature fashioned for high purposes. The big battles of life require sterner moral principles to bring them to a triumphant issue. She was not gifted with that altruism which enables one to meet a great crisis with the utter self-abnegation by which alone such crises are successfully overcome. Pamela fought her great battle handicapped by reason of her limitations. The high ideals which, while unfaced with any great issue, she had cherished with unconscious hypocrisy failed her in the stress of her need. She was just a weak, loving woman, stricken to the heart, and lonely beyond words to describe,—a woman hungry for her lover, whose last scruple of honour faded into nothingness in the period of his absence.

Arnott came home unexpectedly. He sent no intimation of his return; he had not, as a matter of fact, intended to turn back when he did. He obeyed an odd impulse, prompted by a queer, unaccountable fear that if he prolonged his absence Pamela might grow reconciled to doing without him, might grow independent of him. He felt no longer so confident that his temporary separation had been a wise move. He had prolonged it unduly. He had given her time to miss him, and had made the mistake of giving her further time in which to grow used to the idea. With this doubt in his mind he hurried back.

He got back in the afternoon rather late for tea. They had met with contrary winds round the coast, and the boat was delayed some hours. Arnott took a taxi at the docks and drove out to his home. He dismissed the taxi at the gate and carried his luggage himself up the path and dumped it down on the stoep for one of the servants to take inside. Then he looked about him with a strange feeling of unreality, and an unexpected sensation of nervousness that manifested itself chiefly in the dryness of his throat. Where, he wondered, was Pamela? This return to a silent, unwelcoming house was disconcerting. He forgot that he was not expected, and began to feel unreasonably annoyed.

And then abruptly he became aware of Pamela, standing in the opening of the drawing-room window, gravely regarding him. He looked round suddenly, and their gaze met.

“So you have come back?” she said.

Her eyes were deep and very intense; the man as he met their shining look felt certain of his welcome. He advanced towards her quickly.

“Couldn’t stick it any longer, Pam,” he said. “I wanted you.”

He held out his arms. She went forward unhesitatingly, and put her arms about his neck and drew his face to hers and kissed him.

“I am so glad you have come home,” she said.

Arnott’s clasp of her tightened.

“Oh! Pam,” he said, “how good, how jolly to have you again.”

He drew her inside the room, looking away from her a little awkwardly, looking about him with an overdone air of ease. Pamela also, now that their greeting was over, assumed an outward calm which she certainly was not feeling, and busied herself with the tea things, having an equal difficulty it seemed in meeting his eyes. That, she discovered later, was one of the developments of their adjusted relations, a sort of furtiveness, that comprised a mixture of deprecation and a shamed shyness that was more instinctive than anything else. The realisation of this hurt her; it detracted immensely from the beauty of their love. But just at first she did not recognise it other than as a temporary embarrassment; it did not distress her particularly.

“I was just going to have a lonely tea,” she said, and rang the bell for a fresh supply; “and now—there’s you!”

She glanced at him brightly, a swift colour flushing her cheeks. He seated himself on the sofa near the tea-table, and studied her curiously when he believed himself unobserved. He speculated on what might be in her mind, what the actual thoughts and feeling were which she hid so successfully behind her welcoming manner. For the first time within his knowledge of her he realised a subtlety, a certain secretive force, which he had not suspected in her. It was like coming unexpectedly upon a familiar spot and finding the view altered and contracted by surprising innovations. One felt that behind the obstructions the prospect was exactly the same; it was one’s own view that was restricted and created these new impressions.

“It’s good to be home,” he said, and dropped into a discursive chat about the places he had visited. “Tried all I could to get rid of the thought of you, Pam,” he said at the finish, and glanced at her with a sudden, faintly deprecating smile. “It wasn’t a bit of use. You pursued and brought me back... God! how you haunted me at nights! ... And your face looked back at me from the water whenever I gazed down at the sea.”

Pamela sat down beside him. She slipped a hand into his, but she did not look at him.

“It’s been the same with me,” she said,—“you were always there, somehow. I wonder... I suppose there are lots of people like ourselves who grow dependent on one another... You’ve never been away from me before.”

“And you missed me?” he questioned.

She looked at him then with grave, perplexed eyes, and nodded.

“It was an experiment,” he said presently. “I wanted to see if we could do it—and we can’t... We can’t part.”

“And we can’t,” Pamela repeated slowly. “No, I don’t think we can.”

Suddenly she leaned forward and played nervously with a little fanciful spoon in her saucer.

“I meant to,” she said,—“at first. I felt—I still feel it’s the right thing to do. After you had gone away, I knew I couldn’t. I suppose I am not a good woman really.” She broke off the jerky sentences, and gazed at him somewhat wistfully. “It’s hard to want to be happy, and to know that one ought not to be. I suppose that’s why she told me... She wouldn’t leave me to be peacefully ignorant. She wanted to stretch me on the rack too.”

“Lord knows!” he answered, and stirred his tea irritably. “She’s threatened to tell you,” he added, “ever since some fool of an acquaintance, who’d been out here and was struck with the name, told her that I was living here; but I thought I could intercept the letter. I didn’t allow for it coming to the house. I knew she would never make an open scandal. She’s too proud, for one thing. Besides, she is absolutely indifferent. So long as we are not in the same country, it would never trouble her what I did.”

“But,” said Pamela, a little shyly, “she must have loved you once.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I am beginning to doubt myself, whether it is really love which brings the greater part of the world together. Not infrequently curiosity is at the bottom of it,—or the desire to make a home. The majority of cases, of course, are the result of passion,—the fundamental scheme for the continuance of the race. I don’t see that it’s much use bothering one’s head about these matters. I married when I was a hot-headed young fool; after I found out my mistake—too late. I met love... Well, I suppose I ought to have turned my back on love,—and I didn’t. There you are.”

“Yes,” Pamela returned slowly. “That is just the part I find it impossible to excuse. That was your big error; and it is

going to be responsible for our further wrong-doing.”

“Look here!” he cried. “Life is in one’s own hands. One either makes it difficult by moralising, or simple by being philosophical and taking all it has to offer. It holds a lot of good for you and me, Pam... Why moralise?”

“Because,” Pamela answered, and her eyes filled with unexpected tears, “in making a deliberate choice of evil I don’t wish to cheat myself into believing that it is the only course open to me; it isn’t. If I am a bad woman, I will at least be sincere.”

He took her two hands and held them between his own and looked with kindly tolerance into the sweet, distressed face. He no longer felt any need to plead with her; he knew his case was won. Very tenderly he put her hands to his lips.

“You odd inconsistency,” he murmured, “how you delight in tormenting yourself! Can’t you see that in this matter you are entirely blameless? All the evil is mine. You are driven into a corner, poor child. Nobody in his senses would hold you responsible. Put the blame on to me, Pam,—I’m equal to shouldering it.” He slipped an arm about her, and drew her closer. “If it had all to be gone through again, I’d do the same.”

Chapter Seven.

For the first few months after Arnott’s return Pamela enjoyed once more the delirious happiness of a second honeymoon. Arnott was very much in love, very grateful to her for her acceptance of her awkward and delicate position. He was bent on making good in every way possible. His love overflowed in floods of grave tenderness: he lavished upon her unexpected and extravagant gifts. Pamela appreciated his tenderness; but the gifts—too frequent and haphazard, suggesting that he recognised the necessity for pleasing and propitiating her—hurt her; it seemed to her that they represented the price of her degradation. She was reminded continually that she was no longer a free woman: she was a man’s mistress, bought and owned by hire. The price of the jewels he heaped upon her might be taken as an estimate of her value. Always he had been generous to her; he had given her many valuable presents, on her birthday, on their marriage day, and such like occasions, not, as he did now, at odd moments as though he had constantly in his mind the humiliation she endured for his sake, as though he felt the necessity to express his gratitude in some fashion, to reward her uncomplaining devotion.

Pamela endured many hours of secret shame over these glittering evidences of his recognition of their altered relations. But the thing which wounded her most, wounded her whenever she looked into the clear eyes of her child, whenever the sound of little feet, the sweet shrill baby voice, fell upon her ears, was the knowledge that this little innocent creature—her baby—was born out of wedlock, was a bastard.

Pamela’s mind was growing accustomed to the use of ugly terms, which she recognised fully that the world—if the world ever learnt the truth—would connect with her name and with her child’s. Such terms had once been an offence in her ears,—now they fitted her; they were no less an offence, but she accustomed herself to them. She was brutally frank with herself in the matter of her voluntarily accepted, shameful position.

But in one matter she determined she would always remain secretive; the child should never learn the facts of her parents’ marriage. Neither she nor Arnott could ever requite the injury they had done the child. She had sinned in ignorance, his was the greater sin; but now her responsibility, her culpability, exceeded his. Her knowledge of the truth made her duty to the child manifestly clear; but duty had fought its unequal battle, and was beaten to the dust.

Pamela’s honour had gone down into the mud, a beaten and trampled thing. She had made her first great mistake, and already her punishment was beginning. In yielding against all her principles of right, though he had fought his hardest to conquer her scruples of honourable decency, she had lost to a great extent Arnott’s respect. At the moment when knowledge first came to her, when she had so miserably tried to do what was right, his respect for her had stood so high, had been so immense and overwhelming and self-humiliating, that instead of hating her chastity which threatened to part them, he had only loved her the more strongly because of it, had admired and wanted her more insistently; now he recognised that in this weak, yielding woman, whose passion for him equalled his passion for her, subjugated all her finer qualities, he held an easy captive; a captive who shrank from freedom, who had ceded all right to be considered before and above himself.

When the first flush of triumph over his victory had worn off, and with it his almost humble gratitude for her tender submissiveness, the quality of his love underwent a change, a change which manifested itself in surprising and disconcerting ways. The sensualism in his nature, which he had never allowed her to suspect hitherto, was no longer kept under; little discourtesies, formerly never practised, became common with him; on occasions he was openly rude to her. He atoned for these lapses afterwards with presents and demonstrations of greater affection. He believed that Pamela forgot these occasions as soon as he did; she always forgave readily and responded at once to his kinder moods; but Pamela did not forget. Each act of discourtesy, each rough word, left its wound in her soul.

She realised, despite Arnott’s reiterated insistence that, save for the distress which this knowledge afforded her, everything remained really unchanged, that this was not so. The whole fabric of their world was changed. Their union became a deliberate criminal conspiracy, a furtive defiance of the laws of the land; it had ceased to be a bond of comradeship based on mutual esteem,—it had ceased to be a bond in any sense of the word, save in their dependence on one another. A love which has once been fine and free and frankly expansive contracts in an atmosphere of secrecy and shamed suppressions; it loses vitality.

There was in the changed conditions of her life much which influenced very strongly Pamela’s development. Strange new emotions were born in her with all the anguish of new birth; a deeper understanding and at the same time a less generous conception of life grew in her. She lost something of her joyous irresponsibility and acquired a profounder

wisdom. It was as though her mind developed while her soul's growth remained temporarily arrested. And during the process the girl in her died for ever and the woman evolved in her stead.

No one can pass through a grave crisis and emerge unchanged from the devastating floods that submerge one during the process. It depends entirely on the moral strength of the individual plunged into these deep waters whether he or she rises above them grandly, or merely flounders desperately until an insecure footing results as the waters recede. The calm mind, the braced purpose, of the moral victor, faces the dark hour and conquers it, and gains even from the bitterest struggle much which beautifies and is helpful to the soul, much which makes each succeeding battle to be fought simpler of conquest than the last; on the other hand, to reject the fight from motives of fear or other reluctance leaves one not only a loser in the battle, but shorn of the necessary armour wherewith to face the next fight. Pamela had lost her battle; she had thrown aside her armour and surrendered, because victory seemed to promise only an empty reward. She lost more than she knew by her surrender; not only did she forfeit her self-respect, her purity, her great gladness in life; she lost too the clean honest delight in Arnott's love for her, in her love for him; the bright pleasant surface of things was smudged and dull; she no longer breathed in the open; it was as though ugly walls enclosed and stifled her soul.

Inexplicably, she blamed the woman who had enlightened her,—Arnott's wife,—more than she blamed Arnott himself for these miserable new conditions. She rebelled at being forced to shoulder the responsibility of her own act. If only she had been left in ignorance! ... From the bottom of her stricken, aching heart she wished that she had never received, never opened, that fatal letter. She wanted to go back to the period of her ignorance, wanted intensely to have her unsullied happiness again; and that was impossible. The door which has once stood open no longer conceals what it guards, nor can the surface of a thing that is tarnished attain to the same pristine beauty as before.

During those first months of knowledge, Pamela passed through many varied phases; from dull misery, to heroic intention, which ended in a passive defeat and an acceptance of the new conditions. There followed a period of shamed, yet glowing, happiness in Arnott's return. This phase waned all too speedily, and left only discontent and distressful self-reproach, and a first doubt as to the selflessness of Arnott's devotion. After a while these emotions also faded, ceased in time to harass her continually; and she drifted into a state of careless apathy, a comatose condition of the soul, the result of which only future events could determine, according to the influences and impressions that were likely to bear on her life.

It was during this period of indifference, of atrophied emotions, and moral inertia, that her second child was born to her,—a son. What once had been the crowning wish of her life was now granted when she had ceased to desire the gift. The birth of the boy was her final humiliation.

Arnott, himself, awaited the coming of this child with mixed emotions; its birth was at once a source of triumph and of disgust to him. The last remnant of respect he retained for Pamela died at the boy's birth. He scorned her weakness, yet he rejoiced at it because of the more complete hold it gave him upon her. She could never reproach him with being the father of their second child; she must even cease to reproach him for the past. She was now equally guilty with him.

Pamela had made her first great mistake in refusing to part from him; her second greater mistake resulted in the birth of their son.

By an odd chance, as though an ironic fate decreed that this child should perpetuate the older shame of his parents' bigamous marriage with the later shame of his own birth, the baby was born on the anniversary of the wedding day. The old custom of keeping up that date as the most festive day in the year would assuredly have lapsed, even had the boy's coming not made it an impossibility. Whatever Arnott felt about the matter, Pamela could not have celebrated with her friends the mock event which formerly had been to her a glad and sacred rite. She deeply regretted that the boy's birth fell on the same date. Always she would be reminded of that date, would be compelled to recognise it. With each year of the child's growth it would assume an added importance, call for greater distinctiveness; the child when he grew old enough would insist on its recognition.

Arnott bought her a diamond bracelet to celebrate the double event; but he had sense enough not to present his offering until she was downstairs again and able to take an interest in things. He gave it to her one afternoon out in the garden.

They had had tea together under the trees, and Pamela lay in her cane lounge, so still and so unusually silent that he fancied she was drowsy, and remained quiet also in order not to disturb her. But Pamela was not asleep; she was lost in thought. Suddenly she opened her eyes and looked at him fully.

"I have been thinking about a name for baby," she said. "Have you any preference in the matter?"

"No," he answered.

He thought he detected a slight shade of vexation pass across her face, and added, after reflection:

"Why not Herbert? ... We've reproduced you."

She flushed faintly.

"That was your wish," she said. "But it seems to me confusing when the children are christened after the parents."

"Well, it was merely a suggestion," he returned easily.

"I think I should like him called David, after my father," she added presently. "He was the best man I have ever known."

Arnott made no response. The expression of her reason for her selection seemed to him in the circumstances uncalled for.

"You don't dislike the name, I hope?" she asked.

"No. I don't say I'd choose it. It's rather Welsh, isn't it?"

"It's British," she replied, "anyway."

"Look here!" he said, dismissing the subject of the baby's name, and fumbling in his pocket for the present which he had brought out with him, "I've something here for a good girl."

He leaned forward and dropped the case into her lap. Pamela took it up and opened it carelessly. She was growing a little bored with having to express gratitude so frequently for his thought for her.

"Another!" she said, and held the bracelet in a languid hand. She made no effort to try it on. "You really shouldn't be so extravagant, Herbert. I have more jewellery than I can possibly wear."

He went round to her chair and slipped the bracelet on her arm and fastened it.

"It's pretty," he said... "You like it?"

"It's beautiful," she replied.

"And my thanks?" he said.

He leaned over her. Flushed, faintly reluctant Pamela lifted her face in response. He kissed her eagerly. She always failed to understand his appreciation of these exacted caresses. It was one of his peculiarities that he enjoyed what he gained masterfully more than what was voluntarily ceded.

Chapter Eight.

Dare sat on the stoep of his hotel in Johannesburg reading a letter from Mrs Carruthers, who kept up a spasmodic correspondence with him at his own urgent request; her letters, he explained, gave him a sense of living still in the world. One clause in this letter interested him particularly; it was a clause which referred to Pamela.

"I have just returned," the writer stated, "from the christening of the Arnott baby,—a querulous man-child whom I have undertaken to keep uncontaminated from the wiles of the devil,—a preposterous thing to ask one human being to do for another. Being a childless woman myself, I am more afraid of my godson than of the devil, the latter being so conveniently unsubstantial. Whether it is the added cares of maternity, or due to the fact that the connubial bliss I once dilated upon to you is not so assertive as it was a year ago, your sweet-faced divinity is decidedly less prepossessing in appearance. I would never have believed that a year could age a woman as it has aged Pamela Arnott. Besides looking older, she is considerably less gay. But she is a dear woman, all the same."

The writer passed on to other matters, and mentioned that she was glad there was a chance of seeing him shortly. She hoped while he was in Cape Town he would spare them a few days.

Dare folded the letter and placed it in his pocket-book; then he sat back in his chair and fell to thinking about Pamela. Why, he wondered, should a year make such a difference in a woman's appearance that to her intimate friends who saw her continually this change should be so apparent? And what had caused the diminution in the married happiness which, little as he had seen of the Arnott's home life, he too had been conscious of? Pamela had radiated happiness on the evening he first met her.

He recalled Mrs Carruthers' words, uttered carelessly to him that night in the garden, when she had alluded to the Arnotts' marriage as an instance of perennial courtship, and had added, with a touch of sarcasm not altogether innocent of malice: "But, after all, five years is but a step of the journey."

That bore out what more than one married man had told him, that it was the silliest mistake man or woman ever made to imagine that because one is violently in love for a period that state of erotic bliss is going to endure.

"It's beyond the bounds of possibility," one man had said to him recently in palliation of his own unfaithfulness. "And it's a good thing all round for the race that we are as we are."

But Dare had a conviction that, given the right woman, his love would endure to the end. The right woman for him, he believed, was Pamela; and she was beyond his reach.

Feeling as he did about Pamela, the wisest course for him to pursue was to keep out of her way. He realised this fully; at the same time he desired very earnestly to see her. Since she was ignorant of his feeling in regard to her, he argued, there could be no harm in their meeting; he had sufficient self-control to be able to converse with a woman without allowing her to suspect that he was interested in her in any marked degree. Indeed, he would have found his interest difficult to explain. To assert that he had fallen in love at sight with the face of a girl he had seen several years ago and never spoken to until he met her later as a married woman, would have lain him open to ridicule; it would have strained the credulity, he felt, of Pamela herself. He had heard of cases of love at first sight, but he had not believed in them prior to his own experience. It had always seemed to him that love could be begotten only of some quality of deep attraction in the personality of the individual. Certainly had he not found those attractive qualities in Pamela when eventually he met her, the romance he had cherished for five years would have gone the

way of dreams; but his meeting with her kindled afresh the fires of his sleeping fancy; and the romance, which had promised to remain only a sentimental memory, was quickened into life. What he had loved in the girl's face, he loved again in her personality. He was quite satisfied that Pamela was as sweet as she looked; and he determined to play the unobtrusive part of the silent male friend to this woman who was his ideal. He would not deny himself the pleasure of her society merely because he loved her. Never from look or word of his should she guess his secret. But if destiny ever offered him the chance of serving her, he would count himself well rewarded for his undeclared devotion.

The news concerning Pamela in Mrs Carruthers' letter, quite as much as his own feelings, made him feverishly anxious to see her again. Business was taking him to Cape Town; he decided that when he was through with the business he would put in a little time on his own account; and Mrs Carruthers' invitation fitted in with his plans.

He wrote her a cordial, but guarded, letter, in which he told her that he would take her at her word and bring himself and his suit case along and enjoy himself for a week. He followed shortly after the despatch of his letter.

Once arrived in Cape Town, the doubtful wisdom of his action in laying himself open to the direct influence of Pamela's personality struck him forcibly for the first time. He stood to lose more than he was ever likely to gain in thus venturing so close to the flame. He was likely to emerge from the conflict scarred pretty badly, he told himself. But no amount of prudent reasoning could overcome his desire to see her again; that desire was paramount; it subdued every argument he brought forward against it. It was not wise, he allowed. But was a man in love ever wise?

He had resolved when he first met Pamela Arnott, and discovered in his friend's wife the girl he had seen years before, to go out of her life finally; he had felt that it would not be safe to continue an acquaintance which could only be disturbing to himself, if indeed it developed no further inconvenience; but that suggestion in Mrs Carruthers' letter that everything was not as formerly in the conditions of Pamela's life shook this resolution, unsettled him. He wanted to judge for himself. If, as Mrs Carruthers had seemed to insinuate, Pamela was no longer happy in her marriage, then perhaps...

He broke off in his reverie, frowning at his own unbidden thoughts. If there was a grain of truth in that disquieting statement, it was very plain to him that the position of sympathiser was the last thing for him to take upon himself. The platonic, useful friend was very well in theory, but it didn't answer put into practice as a rule, particularly in the case of the disappointed wife fretting at the conditions of her lot.

Dare had arrived at Mrs Carruthers to find her out, but he was sufficiently at home in that house to be equal to settling himself in, even to the ordering of refreshment, which, in the form of a whisky and soda, was brought to him on the stoep. Mrs Carruthers returned to find him reading the English papers, and quietly smoking.

"You look as though you had been sitting there for years," she remarked, as she came up the steps. "When did you get here?"

He came forward with alacrity and took her extended hands. Each displayed unaffected pleasure in the other.

"Oh, about an hour ago! How well you look!"

"I've been enjoying myself. I suppose that's why... Dickie's late."

She seated herself and began drawing off her gloves. Dare returned to his former chair.

"Tell me how you have contrived to get so much pleasurable excitement out of the afternoon," he said.

"Oh, bridging," she said,—“and I won—enormously. But never mind me. What I want to know is, what has abruptly shaken your obduracy? You have persistently refused my pressing invitations for over a year,—and now suddenly you arrive.”

He sat forward and regarded her inquiring face with a faintly amused smile. Ever since he had known her she had subjected him to this kind of suggestive inquiry. She was always reading a motive in his simplest act.

"Your last invitation arrived at a moment when it was possible, as well as agreeable, to accept it," he explained. "I couldn't get away before."

"Umph!" she returned, and laughed. "I thought perhaps—But no matter. Your sex always suits its own convenience. Now tell me exactly what you want to do while you are here, and I'll lay myself out to be obliging. That's a prerogative of my sex, and I've not noticed that you ever attempt to check it."

"Why should one discourage anything so commendable?" he asked.

"That's no answer to my question," she observed.

"No," he returned. "But, you see, the question scarcely needs answering from my point of view. What should I want to do, but enjoy your society, and loaf delightfully?"

"Never at a loss," she said, and smiled at him approvingly. "I hope your ideas of loafing will fit in with my evening's arrangement I have asked the Arnotts and three others in to make a couple of tables for bridge. I had a feeling at the back of my mind that you would wish to see something of your sweet-faced Madonna during your stay, so I wasted no time. Considering that I am three parts in love with you myself, that is rather magnanimous on my side."

"In any one else it might be," he returned; "but you were made like that. Besides, you are fully assured that no one on earth could shake my intense admiration for yourself. I wonder why you married Dick?" he added speculatively.

"All the nicest women are married."

"I wasn't married when I met you first," she reminded him. "The truth of the matter is, you, like the majority of middle-aged bachelors, only appreciate the fruit which grows beyond your reach."

"Middle-aged!" he protested. "Come now! I'm only thirty-five."

"And seventy is the limit the Psalmist gives us. You have wasted your time, my friend."

"Yes," he agreed abruptly, and sat a little straighten, "I'll have to go the pace," he said, "in order to catch up."

"You can make the most of the years that are left you," Mrs Carruthers replied crushingly, "but you can never catch up. If people realised that in their youth, they wouldn't waste their time as they do."

"I wish you wouldn't be so depressing," he expostulated.

"I'm not I'm merely lamenting your lost opportunities. I'm for early marriages, and big families, and bother the cost."

"That's all very fine. But big families can't be launched indiscriminately, and flung on the State."

"People are so prudent nowadays," she said; "they miss a lot of happiness. A jolly struggle is preferable to discreet luxury, with a will at the finish, leaving everything to the stranger or organised charities. I was one of fourteen, and there wasn't a jollier or a poorer home in the Colony."

She laughed, and thrust forward a small, misshapen foot.

"That comes of having to wear my elder sister's outgrown shoes. But if I had had my footgear made for me, my feet would probably have been flat and large; and the sight of an incipient bunion brings back glorious memories of childhood's makeshifts, and the joy of trying on coveted and outgrown clothes. We weren't proud as children. And the bread and butter and onions we ate for supper tasted lots better than the eight-o'clock dinner I take now with Dickie."

She sighed deeply, and became suddenly grave.

"All the rest have big families themselves," she added wistfully. "I'm just out of it."

"Children are mixed blessings," he said consolingly.

"They aren't," she asserted. "They give one the satisfied feeling of carrying on. When we haven't children, we just finish with our own little lives." She sat up and smiled at him with cheerful encouragement. "I have invited a girl for you this evening. She is young and fresh and—"

"Oh, don't!" he interposed hastily.

"She is quite nice to look at," Mrs Carruthers resumed, not heeding his interruption. "She comes of good stock, and is amiable, and not too clever. She dances well, and plays games well, and is thoroughly domesticated,—an orphan, poor,—the eldest of a family of seven."

"Ye gods!" he murmured. "Why didn't you invite the other six?"

"They aren't out," replied Mrs Carruthers.

He repressed a desire to smile.

"It is my particular wish that you pay her special attention," she continued calmly, "with a view to an early and suitable marriage. Now don't make up your mind against it straightway. It will be an admirable thing for you, and I've set my heart on it."

He laughed outright.

"Oh, you woman!" he said. "You inveterate matchmaker! If your girl is all you profess, why can't you find her some one younger and more human? As my wife, she would have the devil of a time—you know she would."

"I think you are rather severe in your judgment of yourself," she returned imperturbably. "You are quite agreeable. And you could provide handsomely for a woman, and—other things."

"Oh, yes; fourteen of them, if necessary," he returned sarcastically. "But I don't want them, really. I should feel horribly embarrassed with them."

"Oh, you would get over that!" she answered easily. "You mustn't think so much of yourself."

He got up and passed round to the back of her chair and laid his two hands on her shoulders.

"You scheming little fiend!" he said. "You have had this in your mind all along when you have asked me repeatedly to come down."

"I have always wanted you to marry," she allowed, smiling up at him. "You will make a delightful husband."

"Well, I'm not going to marry," he said. "If you air any more of your matrimonial plans, I'll make love to you. I'll wreck

your home.”

“You couldn’t,” she said. “Dickie would never trouble to be jealous of any one.” She put up her two hands and laid them upon his where they rested upon her shoulders. “You will be nice to her, George, won’t you?” she said. “You’ll like her immensely, if only you let yourself.”

“Of course I shall,” he replied, and smiled grimly. “I like every Eve’s daughter of you, worse luck!”

Chapter Nine.

Change in a person’s appearance when it is due to mental conditions varies according to mood and outside influences. When Dare was face to face with Pamela Arnott he decided that Mrs Carruthers had exaggerated the want of look about which she had written: there was nothing to excite sympathy, or even comment, in the faintly flushed, pleasantly excited face which turned eagerly to greet him, as, on entering the Carruthers’ drawing-room, Pamela’s eyes singled him out with a smiling welcome in their blue depths.

When he had talked with her a little while he did notice that she looked older; the girlishness, with its expression of frank gaiety, had faded during the past eighteen months.

There was a more perceptible change he considered in Arnott himself. The man had coarsened, in manner as much as appearance. He was more noisy and assertive, and inclined to be offhand when addressing his wife. Dare hated him for that,—hated him for his lack of courtesy, and the absence of those small but significant attentions which had formerly been so noticeable in his bearing towards her. He seldom looked at her now, never with the old tender, almost absurdly chivalrous regard which one associates more with the lover than with the husband of some years’ standing. Dare decided that he had put off the lover finally; that was about what it amounted to. But that, after all, cannot be reckoned a calamity: men do not remain always obviously their wives’ lovers.

“So glad to see you again,” murmured Pamela, and her smile seemed to demand that he should recall the length of the friendship he had once insisted upon, with its consequent intimacy. “I began to think you were becoming a mere memory.”

“So long as you didn’t forget altogether!” he said, and looked earnestly into her eyes. “But I didn’t think you would.”

“One doesn’t forget—pleasant things,” she returned. “Besides, it is only a little over a year and a half since we met, isn’t it?”

“A long year and a half ago,” he replied enigmatically.

Pamela acquiesced with unusual gravity. His speech broke in upon her happy mood, disturbing the careless tenor of her thoughts. A long year and a half! ... Truly it had been a long year and a half for her. So much had happened in the time: her whole life was altered with the changing of the months.

“It has been a long year and a half,” she replied abstractedly, not thinking of the man at her side, nor of the interpretation he might put upon her words, upon the weary discontent of her tones: she thought only of the crowded events of the past eighteen months,—of the pain, the sickening disillusion, the constant humiliation. In certain circumstances a year and a half may seem a lifetime.

He scrutinised her intently. There was something, after all, in Mrs Carruthers’ report. The discontent in her voice, the sadness of her face, arrested his attention. Had it been merely discontent, it would have failed to move him particularly, but her look of sadness roused his deepest sympathy. He rebelled at the thought that any sorrow should touch, should perhaps spoil, her life. She lifted her glance to his swiftly, on her guard, he fancied, against himself.

“I have had rather a dull time,” she added, assuming a lighter manner.

“Dulness is depressing,” he allowed. “I have more experience of it than you, I expect. You’ve not been my way yet?”

“No,” she returned slowly. “I don’t go from home much. You see, there are the children.”

“True!” he said, and kept the conversation in the safer channel into which she had directed it. “And how is my little friend?”

“Oh, growing big—and naughty! I am beginning to think of schoolroom discipline for her.”

“Oh, lord!” he said. “That baby! Let her run wild for a bit longer.”

“You haven’t to live with her,” she said. “But I only mean a nursery governess. She is getting beyond the control of coloured nurses. I am hoping I shall get Blanche Maitland. She is so nice with children.”

“Blanche... Oh, I know,” he said.

His glance followed hers across the room to where the girl Mrs Carruthers was bent on his marrying was talking with their host. So Pamela’s domestic arrangements were to clash with his. He smiled at the fancy. Blanche Maitland was a tall girl, with a noticeably good figure, a clear skin, and fine, dark, slumbrous eyes. Her face in repose was calm and unemotional and difficult to read; when she smiled it lighted wonderfully. She did not smile readily, but she looked really handsome and delightfully shy when surprised into laughter. She was laughing at the moment Dare looked at her: he did not immediately remove his gaze.

"She is handsome," he observed.

"Is she?" Pamela regarded the subject of their talk with renewed interest. "I never thought her that—but I suppose she is."

"She is," he affirmed.

"It isn't a necessary qualification in a governess," she said.

"It would be, if I were engaging one," he returned. "I should make that and an agreeable voice the principal requirements. Personally, I am interested in good-looking faces. And plain people haven't a monopoly of the virtues, you know."

"No," she answered. "But they occasionally more than make up the deficit in looks in agreeable qualities."

"The wise make the most of what they have," he replied. "And sometimes nature is lavish and adds kindness and a sweet disposition to physical perfection... May I come and see you to-morrow?" he asked somewhat abruptly.

"Do. Come and dine—informally. I'll ask the Carruthers."

He looked slightly dissatisfied.

"But I want you all to myself," he objected. "I'm a selfish fellow; I hate sharing. I prefer rather to see my friends singly than in batches. And Carruthers always wants to play bridge. One can't talk. He's fussing about the tables already. Let me come and look at the mountain with you, and gossip, and drink tea. We don't meet very often."

Pamela, if she felt a little surprised, was not displeased at his cool readjustment of her invitation. She returned his steady gaze with a faint uplift of her brows and the hint of a smile in her eyes.

"If you really prefer that, of course you shall," she said.

"I've only a week," he said. "I want to make the most of it."

"And when the week is up?"

"I return to my mole-like habits," he replied.

"And you haven't followed my advice?" she said.

"What was that?" he asked... "Oh! I remember. Mrs Carruthers is always giving me the same. No; I don't think there is much chance of my doing that."

Carruthers sauntered towards them with every intention, Dare realised, of ending the tête-à-tête.

"You play at my table, Mrs Arnott," he said. He glanced at Dare. "The wife has put you at the no-stakes table," he added, grinning. "She thinks it is good for your morals to play for love on occasions."

Dare regarded the speaker coolly.

"That sounds like your joke, rather than Mrs Carruthers'," he remarked; "it's so feeble."

Carruthers chuckled.

"Ask her," he returned.

Pamela looked back at Dare over her shoulder as she moved away beside her host.

"It's quite the best game, really," she said, and smiled at him.

"I admit it," he answered quietly, "when one is allowed to choose one's partner."

Bridge without stakes was not much of a game, in Dare's opinion; but he was obliged to acknowledge that Blanche Maitland played remarkably well. He had never seen a girl play with such skill; and she held good cards. They were partners. This might have been due to chance, since they cut; but he had a suspicion that Mrs Carruthers manipulated the cards. She was clever enough, and deep enough, to do it, he reflected.

He did his best to oblige her in the matter of being agreeable; but, as he complained to her later, when discussing the evening after the guests had left, had he been the vainest of men he could not have flattered himself that he had created a favourable impression in the quarter in which she insisted he should exert his powers of fascination.

"She thought me a stick," he said. "I'm not at all comfortably assured in my mind that she didn't think me a fool. I had an exhausting time racking my brain for agreeable conversation. She wouldn't help me. It isn't a ha'p'orth of use, my dear, trying to interest me in these sphinx-like young women with no small talk. You said she wasn't clever."

"She isn't."

"You are mistaken. No one who isn't clever dare be so deadly dull. She is profound. I don't think I like your selection of a wife."

"You can't judge on a first acquaintance like that," she insisted.

"There you are entirely out. All my loves have been at first sight."

"Then why haven't you married one of them?"

"Because they have all been provided with husbands," he answered. "When it is a matter of transgressing the moral law, one naturally hesitates."

"You seem singularly unfortunate," Mrs Carruthers observed sarcastically. "I believe you have only been in love once in your life. You are true to that first love still."

"And who is that?" he inquired, looking down at her with mild curiosity in his eyes.

"George Dare," she answered.

He laughed.

"Poor devil!" he remarked. "If I didn't show him some affection, who would? Besides, it's a proof that there are lovable qualities in him. If a man can't tolerate himself, he must be a fairly bad egg."

"You are not justified in making a virtue of egoism," she argued. "And you ought to marry. It's a duty you owe the State... Men are so selfish!"

"Oh, come!" he remonstrated. "One can't place all the big questions of life on such a brutally practical basis. There's the human side to be considered. Your argument lowers the beautiful to a mere matter of essentials. There is a spiritual element in marriage, after all."

Mrs Carruthers turned a frankly wondering, inquisitive gaze upon him, with the disconcerting observation:

"If you were not in love, you wouldn't talk in that exalted strain. It's unlike you."

"I didn't know I was such a material beast," he retorted.

His eyes met hers for a second or so, and then, to her increasing amazement, avoided her gaze. He thrust his hands in his pockets and looked everywhere save at this woman whom he liked immensely, but whom he hoped to keep comfortably outside his confidence. He was afraid of Mrs Carruthers' powers of divination. When a woman takes an affectionate interest in a man, she can become an embarrassment as much as a pleasure.

"You *are* in love!" she cried triumphantly. "It's no use... Own up that I'm right."

"I believe that I have already admitted to you that it is a state which frequently overtakes me," he replied.

But his manner, despite its banter, lacked assurance. He felt that she was not in the least deceived.

"And you never told me!" she said reproachfully.

"There is nothing to tell. My love affairs never lead anywhere. Besides, it's such an old story."

"Old!" she echoed.

He smiled at the indignant incredulity in her voice.

"It's running Jacob's romance pretty close now," he said.

"You are trying to put me off the scent," she declared,— "if there is any scent. You won't persuade me that you have been in love for seven years, and that I knew nothing about it."

"Six years and nearly nine months, to be exact," he answered.

"And who, may I ask, was fortunate enough to win your unswerving devotion six years and nine months ago?" she demanded, with fine sarcasm.

"She hadn't a personality for me," he replied. "I fell in love with a face."

His listener eyed him derisively.

"She hadn't any body, I suppose?" she said.

"Oh, yes, I believe so. The body was there, all right. But if it had been misshapen, or even, as you suggest, non-existent, that wouldn't have made the slightest difference to my affections."

"Oh, don't try to humbug me!" Mrs Carruthers exclaimed. "You can't convince me, after all you have said, that you are in love with nothing more substantial than a face. Where is the girl now?"

"She disappeared," he answered vaguely. "I took the trouble to inquire, believe me. They told me she had married."

"That disposes of her," Mrs Carruthers responded, with that touch of finality which convention brings to bear upon romance that can have no legitimate ending. "It is not decent of you to talk as though you were in love with her still. That's all finished, anyhow."

"One cannot regulate one's feelings," he protested, "to satisfy a silly prejudice like that."

"But it's not fair to the girl," she urged.

"Good lord!" he ejaculated. "The girl doesn't know... How should she? Didn't I tell you that I fell in love with a face—its owner was a stranger to me. I intended to effect an introduction; but some fellow got ahead of me, and carried her off."

"Oh!" said Mrs Carruthers, manifestly relieved.

"A stranger! Then she doesn't count. You have simply been wearying me with your nonsense."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you were genuinely interested. When you are bored you shouldn't appear so eager for details. In a desire to be obliging one is apt to become prosy."

Carruthers entered the room at the moment with a syphon of soda and glasses. Dare eyed the syphon discontentedly.

"I hope you are for offering me something more heartening than that," he remarked. "Your wife has reduced me to a state bordering on nervous collapse. She is starting a matrimonial agency. I wish you would bear me out in the lie that I've got a wife somewhere. I fancy she thinks it is not respectable to be unmarried."

"The whisky is on the table behind you," returned Carruthers, unmoved. "As for bearing you out in the lie, how do I know it is one? It isn't to be credited that every man who poses as a bachelor is single."

"If you are going to talk in that strain," Mrs Carruthers observed, "I'm going to bed. It is past two."

She paused beside her husband, and pointed at Dare with a gesture that conveyed a mixture of derision and tolerant amusement and a certain affectionate malice.

"He has been treating me to a resuscitation of his dead and gone love affairs," she explained, "because I am desirous of interesting him in Blanche Maitland."

"Blanche Maitland! Why not?" quoth Carruthers, squirting soda-water into a glass. "Devilish fine girl. What!"

Dare held the door open for Mrs Carruthers.

"You've entrusted it to quite capable hands, you see," he said. "The worst of it is, old Dick is so hopelessly frank. That is exactly how a man would describe her, and that is exactly how I wouldn't choose to have my wife described. You'll have to try again, Connie."

She placed her hand affectionately on his sleeve.

"You are rather a dear, George," she said softly, and passed out, leaving the astonished man to close the door behind her.

It took a clever woman to accept defeat gracefully, he reflected.

Chapter Ten.

The week Dare had promised himself at Wynberg overlapped and ran into the better part of three weeks. He gave as his reason for this extension of his holiday that he was enjoying himself, and that he felt he needed the rest.

"I suppose it is restful," Mrs Carruthers remarked to him once, "mooning about the Arnott's garden all day. Of course it is more of a change for you than using this garden... You do sleep here."

He looked at her oddly. They were standing on the stoep together. He was just about to visit next door to take Mrs Arnott a book he had promised her. He had explained all this to Mrs Carruthers rather elaborately, and had failed to meet her steady, disconcerting gaze with his usual candour. These daily explanations of his informal visits next door called for much ingenuity, and were growing increasingly embarrassing. He disliked having to account for his doings; at the same time courtesy to his hostess demanded something; he rather fancied that it demanded more than it received.

"I admit the justice of that box on the ears," he said. He held the book towards her. "We dine there to-night, I know; but I promised her she should have this this afternoon. Perhaps you wouldn't mind sending it in with my compliments," he suggested.

"Pamela would be disappointed," she said.

"I believe she would," he agreed.

"George," she looked at him very gravely, and her tone was admonishing, "I don't wish to annoy you,—but do you think you are acting wisely?"

"You couldn't annoy me," he answered. "And I haven't considered the question in that light... What do you think?"

"I think you are growing too interested in Pamela," she replied.

He was silent for a second or so, turning the book he held in his hand and gazing absently at its title. Abruptly he looked up.

"You haven't overstated the truth," he said quietly, a little defiantly, she fancied.

She shook her head seriously.

"I am sorry to hear you admit it. From my knowledge of you, I should have thought that, realising that you would at least have avoided her."

"I am not doing her any harm," he said.

"How can you be sure of that? Two years ago I should have felt confident that you couldn't. I am not so positive now."

"You mean she cares less for her husband than she did?"

The eager light in his eyes as he put the question troubled her. It was not consistent with her opinion of Dare that he should behave other than strictly honourably towards any woman.

"I don't think you ought to have asked that," she returned. He changed colour.

"No," he said; "perhaps not. In any case, there wasn't any need. It's fairly obvious."

"Leave her alone," she counselled.

"Look here!" He took a step nearer to her, and spoke quickly and with a kind of repressed excitement that conveyed more than his actual words how deeply he was moved. "Don't start getting a lot of false ideas into your head. I'm not playing the despicable game you think I'm after. I'm not amusing myself. Amusing myself! God! there isn't much amusement in it. I'm leaving on Saturday,—I've made up my mind to that. But I'm going to see as much of her as I can in the interval. It's the last time... I sha'n't come back, unless I can feel perfectly sure of myself. But I'm going to leave her with the knowledge that I am her friend,—to be counted on if she needs me. I only ask to serve her. If she doesn't want my service, I will stand outside her life altogether."

"My dear boy," she returned disapprovingly, "you are talking arrant nonsense. A married woman can have no need for a male friend such as you propose to be. He is either an object of ridicule to her, or she grows too fond of him. I am afraid you would not become an object for ridicule with Pamela; she hasn't a sufficient sense of humour. You had far better give up going there."

"I can't do that," he said. "But I promise you when I leave here I won't come back."

"Then leave to-morrow," she advised.

"Not unless you turn me out."

"You know I won't do that," she said. "But I don't like it, George. I am—disappointed in you."

"I'm sorry," he said, and having nothing more to add, he left her, and walked away down the path.

She watched the tall figure disappear in the sunshine, and turned and went indoors, feeling justly aggrieved with this man whom she liked because he had fallen below the standard she believed him capable of attaining to. Love is either an elevating or a destructive factor; it is the supreme test of the qualities of the individual. She had believed that George Dare was made of stouter stuff. But the human being does not exist, she philosophised, on whom one can count absolutely. One may be able to answer for a person's actions in relation to most human events, then the unexpected event befalls and one's calculations are entirely at fault.

Dare, as he walked away from her, was fully alive to the criticism his behaviour evoked. He had been aware of her unspoken disapproval for days, had anticipated the inevitable remonstrance. He admitted the justice and the wisdom of her reproof, none the less it irritated him intensely. It is usually the self-acknowledged wrong that one most resents the detection of by another. When a man knows that his steps are tending crookedly he likes to be assured that he is walking straight; even though he recognises the assurance to be mistaken, it gives him a comfortable sense of secure deception.

"After all," he reflected savagely, as though his conscience needed reassuring on the point, "I am intending her no harm. It's my soul that gets scorched."

But he knew, as he crossed the Arnotts' lawn to where Pamela sat under the trees waiting for him, that he was to a certain extent disturbing her peace. He filled the newly created blank in her life, added an agreeable atmosphere of romance and excitement which for the time caused her to cease to miss the happiness she was conscious of missing of late. His homage was gratifying; it reinstated her in her own regard. In these ways he was securing a place for himself, making himself necessary to her.

She looked round at his approach, and a light came into her eyes, a smile to her lips, as he drew near. With his critical faculties keenly alert, following the recent interview, he noted more particularly the gladness of her welcome, and felt the inexplicable something that was like a mute bond of sympathy and understanding between them, perceived the furtive shyness of her glance, the quick change of colour as their hands met; and his mind became extraordinarily clear and active. He roused himself from his mental attitude of personal engrossment, and forced himself to an impartial consideration of her position. There was not a shadow of a doubt about it, though she had

possibly not discovered the fact herself; she was becoming interested in him—in the man, not merely the friend. There wasn't any danger, he told himself,—not yet; but there might be.

He recalled how every day since he had been in Wynberg he had seen her on some pretext or other: they had aided one another in the invention of trivial reasons for meeting. He had not always had her to himself as now: sometimes she had the children with her; on occasions Arnott was present. Arnott always seemed glad when Dare came in; he contrived generally to monopolise the conversation, and was manifestly entirely unaware of Dare's preference for his wife's society. It simply did not occur to him. His friends always admired Pamela; he was never jealous, perhaps because he felt so certain that this woman who had cleaved to him in defiance of her principles of honour, would cleave to him always. Although he was conscious of a waning of his own passion, it did not strike him that any change in himself could possibly weaken her love. He felt absolutely sure of her.

Pamela had been sewing before Dare joined her. When he sauntered across the lawn and drew up beside her chair, she dropped the work into her lap and gave him her undivided attention.

"You've brought the book," she said, and took it from him with a pleased smile. "I rather wondered if you would come to-day."

"Didn't you feel fairly certain I would?" he asked, and fetched a chair for himself, which he placed close to hers, facing her.

He seated himself. Pamela did not answer his question. She opened the book and turned its pages idly. It was a beautifully bound volume of "Paolo and Francesca." He had wished her to read it. But she understood quite well that the poem was a secondary matter; the bringing it to her was the primary motive.

"I am glad to have this," she said. "I think I shall like it. The outside is beautiful, anyway."

"So is the inside," he answered. "But it is a bit on the tragic side. You mustn't look for the happy ending."

"No," replied Pamela gravely. She put the book down and gazed beyond him at the sunshine that lay warmly on the garden, the golden mantle of gaiety which mocks the sadness of the world. "Life isn't all happy ending, is it?"

"For many of us, no," he allowed.

"I think the really happy people," observed Pamela, wrinkling her brows while she pursued her reflections, "are the people who feel least."

"You mean," he said, watching her, "the people who never love?"

"I didn't mean that exactly... And yet, in a way, I suppose I did. I meant the people of moderate passions,—self-disciplined people whose emotions are under control, whose minds are like a well ordered establishment in which nothing is ever out of place. They don't admit disturbing elements, and so their lives run on in an even content. There are no big joys and no big sorrows. I have known several women like that. They suggest twilight somehow,—never the sunlight, and never blank darkness. They are restful."

"I prefer the glowing beauty of vivid contrasts myself," he said. "A world in which there is only twilight would be a prison house."

"And yet you can spend a good portion of your time in the mines!" she said, bringing her face round and smiling at him.

He was glad she had introduced a lighter note into their talk.

"I get my contrasts that way," he returned. "Besides, you can't imagine how jolly it is to drop down into the warm darkness on a broiling sunny day. Come along to the mines some time, and I'll take you down."

"I should be scared to death," she declared.

Quite unexpectedly he put his strong, thin hand over hers.

"I don't think so," he answered. "I wouldn't take you where there was any danger. You would be safe with me."

Pamela flushed deeply. There was in the strong, steady pressure of the nervous fingers which closed upon her hand so much of latent force, of protective power, of sex, that she felt strangely frightened. She wanted to withdraw her hand, and could not; some influence stronger than her own will prevented her. She felt oddly stirred, and immensely troubled and disconcerted. With an effort she lifted her eyes, disturbed and faintly questioning, to his. He was leaning forward, looking into the flushed face with earnest, compelling gaze.

"I'm going back to-morrow," he said jerkily, and was quick to see the startled expression which darkened her eyes as he made the announcement. "This is the last chance I have of seeing you alone. Will you write to me?"

"I don't think—I couldn't," she stammered nervously.

"Then will you promise me that if ever you are in any trouble, no matter what, in which a friend who has your well-being at heart might perhaps be useful, you will write to me? ... You know that I am your friend?" he inquired.

"I believe you are—yes."

"And will you promise what I have asked?" he persisted.

Pamela hesitated, and stared at him with perplexed, embarrassed gaze.

"But there isn't any need," she began...

"Not now; no. I pray there never will be. But you will promise?"

"Yes—oh! yes," she whispered, and, to her own intense dismay, burst into sudden tears. She dashed them hastily away with her disengaged hand. "You're—frightening me," she gasped. "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't cry," he said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm not a beast. I'm not making love to you. But I just wanted you to know that everything I possess, myself included, is at your service at any time, and in any way you choose to command. Perhaps you may never require my services; but at least you know that I wish to be useful. Don't misunderstand me,—that is all I wish to convey."

He released her hand and sat back. Pamela dabbed her eyes furtively, ashamed of her emotional outburst, and angry with herself beyond measure for behaving like a simpleton.

"How silly I am!" she murmured. "I don't know what you must think of me. I don't know why I am crying."

"I think you are very sweet," he said gently, "and beautifully natural. I probably startled you. The unexpected is often disconcerting. If you had been one of the temperamentally even people of whom we have been talking you wouldn't have been startled; but then, in that case, neither should I have been offering knightly service after the manner of a hero of romance. As a sign that I am forgiven, will you sing this evening the song you delighted us with on the night I first met you?"

"What was that?" Pamela asked, still too confused to meet his eyes.

"Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix."

"Oh! Saint-Saëns... Yes, of course I will."

When Dare returned next door, which he did earlier than Mrs Carruthers expected, he amazed her with the abrupt announcement of his intended departure on the morrow.

"You were right," he said, "and I was wrong. I obey your marching orders. And now naturally," he added, smiling at her grimly, "you'll enjoy the feminine satisfaction in a moral victory—which is a euphony for getting your own way."

She approached him with a glad look on her face, which had in it a good deal of admiration, and held out her hand as a man might do.

"I knew it," she cried triumphantly. "Boy, you're straight."

He made a wry face as he shook hands with her. Then suddenly he stooped and kissed her.

"It's the least you can offer me," he said in explanation.

She laughed, well satisfied. She had not been mistaken; he had vindicated her belief in him.

Chapter Eleven.

Dare, as he sat at the Arnotts' dinner-table that evening, making the extra man, the odd number, as he had done on a former occasion, was conscious of two discrepant facts; namely, that he had not decided a moment too soon to quit the danger zone of Pamela's seductive influence, and that he was sincerely sorry he was leaving on the morrow. The regret was, perhaps, the keener sensation of the two; it balanced his sense of moral satisfaction to a nicety. The dinner was the funeral feast of his only real love affair. He intended, when he parted from Pamela that night, never to see her again.

"I was a fool to come," he told himself. "No one can handle fire and expect to escape unhurt. And I knew it was fire I was playing with."

Yet he would gladly have continued to act foolishly. The strongest inducement towards wisdom was the fear that Pamela herself might get singed; fire which spreads ends in a conflagration.

One thing he noticed after the women had withdrawn, and it was not the first time he had observed the same thing, was that Arnott drank more than was good for him. This possibly accounted for the coarsening so evident in the man's general deportment. It disgusted him; though probably had he not been in love with the man's wife it would not have struck him so unpleasantly. It was revolting to think of a sweet, refined woman contaminated by close association with a man of intemperate habits. Arnott was inclined to be offensive when he had been drinking; it was on these occasions that he displayed discourtesy towards his wife. It enraged Dare to see how readily she recognised these symptoms, and how tactful she was in her avoidance of friction. It was as much as he could do at times to be civil to his host. Arnott's self-indulgence was, he supposed, the cause of the cloud which had disturbed the domestic peace. If the man persistently made a beast of himself, it was not surprising that his wife should lose her affection for him.

He was thankful to escape from the dining-room and join Pamela and Mrs Carruthers on the stoep.

Mrs Carruthers, doubtless as a sign of her approval of the decision he had arrived at, acted that evening with a considerate kindness of which he was keenly sensible and gratefully appreciative: she contrived with admirable skill to engage her host and her husband in a political discussion which bored her exceedingly, and which roused Arnott to a heated denunciation of the Hertzog faction. Like many men sufficiently indifferent to public affairs to take no active part in them, Arnott was a fiery critic of anti-imperialism, indeed of any opinions which failed to accord with his own way of thinking. Mrs Carruthers threw in the necessary challenge at intervals in order to keep the talk from flagging, and, to her own amazement, found herself defending some of the backveld ideals.

"I am a staunch believer in race preservation," she announced. "I admire the Dutch for defending their principles, and insisting on the recognition of their language."

"Language!" Arnott sneered.

"Oh! it's a language of sorts, though we may not consider it exactly important. But it's a kind of instinct with them, like the Family Bible, and a contempt for the natives. I don't see why they shouldn't uphold these things."

Dare, talking a little apart with Pamela, gazed thoughtfully at the quiet darkness of the garden and proposed walking in it. She hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then complied. He noted the slight hesitation, and felt glad that she conquered her reluctance. To have refused his request would have seemed to suggest a want of confidence in him. Nevertheless, some impulse, prompted by the recollection of that slight hesitation, impelled him to turn before they got beyond view of the others on the lighted stoep, and confine their walking to the limit of the path in front of the house. He had not intended this at the start; he longed for darkness and solitude. The murmur of voices, the little disjointed scraps of conversation overheard as they passed and repassed, disturbed him irritatingly; Arnott's frequently raised, assertive tones sounded intrusive, broke upon the quiet of the garden discordantly, reminding the two who walked in it of his presence with a needlessly aggressive insistence.

Dare tried to ignore these things, but they jarred his nerves none the less. He had not suspected until recently that he possessed any nerves; but they had made many disquieting manifestations of their actuality of late.

"I can't grow accustomed to the thought that you are leaving to-morrow," Pamela said to him presently. Her voice was low, and betrayed unmistakable regret. The back of her hand brushed his lightly as they paced the gravel slowly side by side. The contact gave him immense satisfaction; he was grateful to her for not increasing the space between them and thus denying him this small pleasure. "Of course I knew you were only down for a short while; but your departure is a little unexpected, isn't it?"

"I came for a week," he answered with a brief laugh. "It's been a long one as days are reckoned, but time skips along when one is enjoying oneself... It was sweet of you to say that, to allow me to think that you will miss me a little. We have had some pleasant times together. The worst of these things is there always has to be an end. I shall miss you more than you will miss me."

"I wonder!" said Pamela.

He turned his head suddenly and looked her squarely in the eyes. The light from the stoep shone on her face and showed it very fair and pale and pure. She turned aside as though unwilling to bear his earnest scrutiny.

"One grows used to people," she said. "Somehow, I have always felt at home with you. When you go away I have a feeling that you won't come back. I had that feeling last time."

"Yet here I am," he said in a lighter tone.

"Yes," she said. "I know. It's stupid of me. I hate losing sight of friends. I have so few."

"Few!" he echoed. "I expect if I had half the number I should reckon myself rich."

"You don't use the word in the sense I do," she returned. "I meant the friends one can depend upon... who wouldn't fail one under any circumstances."

"I understand," he said, and added quietly: "I am glad you place me in that category."

"You head the list," she answered with a faint smile. "I'm not quite sure your name doesn't stand alone."

While she was speaking the belief was suddenly confirmed in her that this man was entirely sincere in his protestations of friendship, that even if he heard the shameful story of her life with Arnott, he would not withdraw his friendship. She felt that she could rely on him, trust him implicitly. She also knew that if she needed help at any time he was the one person in the world she would ask for it. He was so sympathetic that she believed he would understand, as no one else without a similar experience could understand, her position. He, at least, would recognise that she had not acted solely from base motives.

"I shouldn't like to believe that," he said gently; "but I am proud to top the list. I have a feeling to-night," he added slowly, unconsciously watching Arnott as the latter leaned forward in excited argument with Mrs Carruthers, "that we shall yet prove our belief in one another's sincerity. Don't think I am suggesting all manner of unnameable tragedies in your life,—the proof of loyal friendship is to be helpful also in little things. It's rather a rotten idea—isn't it?—that a man can't be pals with a married woman."

"I think so," Pamela answered. "Besides, you've disproved that in your friendship with Connie."

Dare was silent for a moment. There was, he knew, a very substantial difference in the quality of his friendship with Mrs Carruthers and his friendship with Pamela; sentiment was entirely absent in his feeling for the one; in the latter

case the whole fabric of his regard was built upon it. He had a fairly strong conviction that he would throw, over Connie, throw over the whole world if need be, for this other woman. But he also realised with an equal certainty that the one thing he would not do was to allow her fair name to be sullied through his indiscretion. If it were necessary to the maintenance of a platonic friendship to remain at a distance, he would avoid any future possibility of their paths crossing. That much he could do for her. It was the strongest proof of his regard.

"Men and women disprove that theory continually," he returned. "But we only hear of the failures, and that brings discredit on the idea. One might as reasonably argue that the divorce court brings discredit on the married state. The whole thing is absurd."

"I wonder why you never married," Pamela said suddenly. "Somehow, I can't think of you as a married man; and yet you must surely have contemplated marriage. Most men do at some time or another."

"I suppose," he said, "that you, like Connie, regard me as an old fogey and past such things?"

"No," she answered simply. "My husband was older than you when I—when—"

She floundered helplessly, and paused in swift confusion. It was impossible, she found, to refer to her marriage; the word stuck in her throat. Always, it seemed to her in her distress, this galling knowledge that she was not legally married was being forced upon her realisation to her further humiliation. Unable to complete the sentence, she added lamely:

"A man is never too old."

He laughed.

"You think I might find some one to take pity on me even now?"

"I think," she returned warmly, "that the woman who wins you will be very fortunate. And you are only quizzing me in respect of age; you are quite young yet."

"Only recently," he explained, "I have been called middle-aged, and it hurt my vanity. Age, like most things, is relative. When one is in one's teens forty appears senility; when one approaches forty it wears quite another aspect,—a comfortably matured, youthful aspect compared with which the teens are puerile. The heart defies wrinkles. I resent being described as middle-aged: it tempts me to the committal of youthful follies."

They had reached the end of the path and were beyond the circle of light from the stoep. Dare brought up abruptly, and instead of turning, halted, and faced her in the gloom of the overhanging trees. His eyes scrutinised her face in the dimness with tender intensity.

"This is the last lap," he said. "I'm going to take you back now, and you'll sing for me. 'Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix.' ... Don't you love the words? They express better than any words in our language could just exactly how the dear particular voice affects one... Oh! little friend, I wish that fate did not decree that our paths in life must diverge just here, and so seldom cross."

"That bears out what I have felt," said Pamela slowly, gazing steadily bade at him. "You won't come again."

"Who can say?" he returned. "I feel—and I think you do too, though you are too wise and sweet to say so—that it is better I should stay away. I want you to bear me always kindly in your thoughts. And when I am near you I am never quite confident that I shall not say something which may lower me in your esteem. I shouldn't like to do that. Man is but human, and humanity has some of the brute instincts, though we flatter ourselves we are only a little lower than the angels,—that little makes all the difference. Shall we turn back?"

Pamela acquiesced in silence, and walked in silence to the house. She was conscious that Dare talked, but she scarcely heard what he said in her troubled preoccupation. What he had said beyond there in the shadow of the trees was repeating itself over and over in her mind. She could not misunderstand the purport of his words; and she felt sorry. She liked him so well. She wanted to keep and enjoy his friendship,—wanted him to be in her life, not forced by a recognition of the weakness he hinted at to stand always outside. Why could they not have remained friends in the real sense of the word, as he had first suggested? His admission made it impossible. She felt angry with him. She wanted his friendship so urgently.

"You are not offended with me?" he asked presently, struck by her unheeding silence which insensibly conveyed a hurt resentment. He put the question twice before she answered him.

"No," she replied. "But—"

"But?" he prompted gently.

"I want your friendship," she said quickly, with a little nervous catch of her breath. "I thought I had it... And you are making it impossible."

"Oh! no," he answered. "I am making it very possible. It is because I feel I may perhaps be useful as a friend that I have been so honest with you. Don't make any mistake about that."

She made no response. They were approaching within hearing of the others, and Mrs Carruthers was leaning on the rail of the stoep, watching their slow advance, observing them, it occurred to Pamela, from the concentrated earnestness of her look, with an unaccountable interest. She leaned towards them as they came up.

"I'm on the verge of quarrelling with every one," she said with remarkable cheerfulness. "You've only arrived in time to prevent bloodshed. If you have tired of doing the romantic, come in and let us have some music."

"Sing to us, Mrs Arnott," pleaded Carruthers,—“something soothing. My wife has been most extraordinarily aggravating."

Pamela made some laughing response, and joined him. Mrs Carruthers turned towards Dare, who remained standing alone at the top of the steps.

"I have saved the situation for you this evening," she said, "and lost my own temper. But I am thankful for three things."

"And they are?" he inquired.

"That there is no moon,—that you turned back when you did,—and that to-morrow is not many hours off."

"I never believed before," he returned drily, "that it was in your nature to be unpleasant."

She smiled encouragingly.

"You are only beginning," she said, "to gauge my possibilities."

Chapter Twelve.

Of the beauty of friendship much has been said and written, but little of its danger. In a friendship between the sexes there is always danger; for a friendship between a man and a woman is based on an entirely different sentiment from any other relation. The danger may not be apparent; in many cases it is latent; but the spark which will ignite it is present in the attribute of sex, and the unforeseen accident of circumstance may fire it at any moment. Men realise this more readily than women, perhaps because they are less given to subduing these qualities. Dare's resolve to act on Mrs Carruthers' advice and flee the danger was the result of his recognition of it. His sudden departure was an acknowledgment of his own weakness, and at the same time a proof of strength of purpose. To act contrary to one's inclination for the sake of principle entails sacrifice.

The sacrifice did not affect him solely. This abrupt cessation of their pleasant intercourse made a fresh break in Pamela's life. For some weeks after he had gone she missed his society greatly; his frequent, unexpected visits had added a pleasurable excitement to her days; she had grown used to his dropping in at all hours, had grown to look for him. Until he was gone she had not realised how much she had enjoyed these visits; now that they had ceased she felt unaccountably lonely.

She sought distraction from the dulness of her home by going out a good deal, and took up again with feverish energy the old round of social pleasures which the tragic discovery of the deception of her marriage had interrupted. She had had little heart for such things of late, and had made the baby's advent an excuse for retirement.

She started entertaining again in the lavish manner of happier days, and so filled in the blank which Dare's departure had created. She had not suspected until he left how much she had grown to depend on him. It distressed her not a little to discover that she missed him so greatly; she felt ashamed to acknowledge it even to herself.

Arnott was on the whole rather pleased to observe what he believed to be Pamela's reawakened interest in life. He had resented her persistent avoidance of all save a favoured few of her former friends. Her attitude had struck him as a tacit reproach to himself, and this had annoyed him. Her resumption of neglected duties won him over to greater amiability, and kept him more at home. Since the birth of the boy, the care of whom had been a tie upon Pamela, he had fallen into the habit of motoring alone into Cape Town and spending much of his time at his club. The parental rôle was not at all in his line.

He could not understand why Pamela refused to engage a capable European nurse, and hand the care of the children over to her. Nevertheless, when Pamela suggested having a governess for them, he opposed the idea vigorously. A nurse was reasonable, he argued; but a governess was not a servant, and would be continually in the way. He disliked the idea of admitting a stranger into the household.

Pamela allowed the matter to drop for a time, but she did not give it up entirely. She discussed it with Mrs Carruthers, and Mrs Carruthers made inquiries for her, and ascertained that Blanche Maitland would be quite willing to undertake the position. After the lapse of a few months Pamela broached the project with greater determination. In the interval she invited Blanche to the house on several occasions with a view to accustoming Arnott to her. It was following one of these occasions that she opened the subject again.

"That girl seems to be here fairly often," Arnott remarked. "What is the attraction?"

"I like her," said Pamela. "She is quiet, and nice."

"She's quiet enough," he admitted.

"I want you to agree to my engaging her as nursery governess," she said. "Pamela is growing big enough to begin easy lessons, and both the children need a white woman's care. They must have an educated person with them. It is impossible for me to be with them all day."

"I don't see why a good European nurse," he began.

But she interrupted him firmly.

"There are very few good European nurses to be had out here," she declared, and urged her reasons more strongly.

Arnott was not easily won over. He resented the idea of a stranger in the household, whom he could not ignore as he might a nurse, to whom it would be necessary, he complained, to be civil.

"I don't see why a nurse shouldn't be good enough for our kids as well as for other people's," he grumbled. "A governess is always in the way."

"I will take very good care she doesn't get in your way," Pamela returned. "And I don't fancy you will find it difficult to be civil to Blanche."

"You can't treat a girl like that as if she were a nursemaid," he objected.

"Of course not. One need not go to extremes either way."

He looked at her with some displeasure, made an impatient sound between his teeth, muttered: "Damn the kids!" and finally gave in.

"You'll never leave off pestering until you get what you want," he said. "You can try the experiment, but as soon as it becomes a nuisance you will have to make other arrangements."

"All right," Pamela agreed cheerfully, satisfied at having gained her point, and feeling very little anxiety as to the result of her venture. "You'll see; it will work admirably. And I shall have far more leisure to devote to your exacting self."

He suddenly smiled.

"I'm glad you recognise that you have neglected me of late," he observed. "I've been of no greater account in this household than a piece of waste paper since the boy came."

Pamela flushed painfully. It was the first time Arnott had made any direct allusion to the change that was gradually alienating their sympathies. The knowledge that he too recognised it added to the distress of her own unwilling acceptance of the inevitable estrangement.

"I too have felt that we were—were growing a little apart," she faltered. "You don't seem to need me quite so much as you did."

"What's the use of needing you when I can't have you?" he grumbled. "The kids always come first with you."

"You don't mean that," she said quickly.

Arnott laughed, and put a careless arm about her shoulders.

"I'm only teasing, Pam," he said. "You don't stand chaff like you used to. You were rare sport at one time. What's changing you?"

"Life," she answered quietly.

"Oh, rot!" he ejaculated irritably. "That's talking heroics. Your life runs on fairly even lines. Don't be melodramatic."

He kissed her lightly, and released her. The next day he brought her a present out from town. In this manner he believed he smoothed away unpleasantness.

Pamela settled the matter of the governess by engaging her immediately, thus giving Arnott no opportunity for reconsidering his reluctant acquiescence. Within the month Blanche Maitland was established in the house, and very quickly made herself indispensable to Pamela. She was not only useful with the children; she took over many domestic duties which she contrived to fit in without interfering with her legitimate occupation. Pamela stood out for a time against this encroachment on her province. She was not altogether satisfied to have her home run by a stranger. But Blanche seemed so anxious to prove helpful, and was so excellent with the children, that little by little she gave way, until practically the entire control passed into Miss Maitland's capable hands. After a while Pamela decided that it was rather agreeable to have the housekeeping worries lifted from her shoulders. She increased Miss Maitland's salary in recognition of her worth, and became a mere cipher in the management of her home.

The arrangement pleased Arnott. Miss Maitland was more efficient as a housekeeper than Pamela had ever been; and her release from these ties enabled his wife to devote more of her time and attention upon himself. She too was happier in the new arrangement. Arnott showed a renewed pleasure in her society. Being a man who did not make friends, his wife's companionship was to a great extent necessary to him; now that he could enjoy it freely whenever he desired he fell into the habit of wanting her and became somewhat exacting in his demands upon her leisure.

But in this selfish dependency on her company there remained little of the eager gladness in each other, the perfect understanding of happier days. Pamela was sensible of the difference, though she tried to ignore it. It was, she felt largely her own fault. In the difficult time following her enlightenment she had lost her influence over Arnott; had allowed the power she had possessed to slip away from her in her timid shrinking from ugly realities, and her newly acquired distrust of himself. She had strained his love and patience often in those days, and she was reaping the result now.

These things troubled her no longer to the extent they once had done. She was becoming reconciled to the changes in her life. Although she strove to fight against an increasing indifference in her own feeling towards him, she knew that her love was not as perfect as it had been: it had gone down under the shock, and come out of the wreckage of her happiness a crippled thing.

When Pamela allowed her mind to dwell on these matters she became frightened. It was terrifying to contemplate what might result if they ceased finally to care for one another. Life together in such circumstances would become unendurable. Plenty of people lived together who were mutually antipathetic, but not in the dishonoured relations of her union with Arnott. A real love alone offered any extenuation—if extenuation could be urged—in defence of their sin against society. She dared not admit a doubt of her loyal devotion, dared not cease to struggle to retain Herbert's affection. Her life became an endless fight to keep alive the shrunken image of the old love. A love which needs constant tending and guarding and encouraging is a difficult plant to keep flourishing: when one is compelled to resort to artificial stimulus it is a proof that the nature has gone out of it.

Pamela had at one time regarded the Carruthers' married life as a rather prosy affair; now she was inclined to envy the humdrum content of this eminently well-mated couple. If there was not much actual romance in Connie Carruthers' life, there was solid satisfaction and entire trust. She and Dick Carruthers had been comrades rather than lovers, and they remained comrades still.

"Don't you think," Pamela observed to her one day, when she came in to see her godson, and take tea, as she often did, with the children, "that babies make a big difference? ... They seem to come between the parents... They make a break. I suppose it's because they claim so much of one's time and attention."

"Yours don't get it, whatever they may claim," Mrs Carruthers answered. "And children are the only decent excuse for marriage. I wish I had a dozen."

She looked at Pamela curiously, not quite sure what to make of her speech, and not liking it particularly. The children had just been taken away by Miss Maitland. Pamela had let them go reluctantly. Whatever her opinion as to the desirability of children, she was unquestionably devoted to her own.

"They make a difference," Pamela insisted.

"Of course they do. They interfere with one's comfort. It's good discipline for selfish people. Why, you silly person, you would be miserable without your babies."

Pamela smiled drearily.

"I suppose I should—now. But I sometimes wish they hadn't come... especially the boy," she added wistfully.

Mrs Carruthers felt slightly uncomfortable. She had an instinctive dread of intimate confidences; and the tone of Pamela's plaint occurred to her as significant of a desire to unburden herself. If babies in the house upset Arnott's temper, she did not wish to hear about it. Arnott was a man whom she cordially disliked. It was not in the least surprising to her that Pamela was finding life with him less of an idyll than she had once believed it; the mystery was that she had not suffered disillusion earlier; the man was so absolutely selfish.

"It isn't any use wishing," she replied with a downright commonsense that damped Pamela's disposition to be confidential. "And Blanche relieves you of all trouble. You were lucky to secure that girl. I knew she was a treasure. She is the kind of girl who deserves to have a home of her own to run. But men usually marry the helpless, ornamental women; they are connoisseurs merely in exteriors. Not that there is anything amiss with Blanche's exterior. Dickie admires her tremendously."

"She is very useful," Pamela said. "The children like her."

"Don't you?"

"Oh! yes, of course." Pamela's tone was a little uncertain; it qualified her words, Mrs Carruthers thought. "One can't have everything," she went on, in the manner of one weighing advantages against disadvantages, and finding the balance fairly even. "She is an enormous help to me—indeed, I am growing to depend too much on her. But I don't see enough of the children since she came. When I am home and able to have them, she has some reason which interferes. It is always a sound reason. But there is so much discipline in the nursery now; it robs me of a good deal of enjoyment. The children don't belong to me any more."

"Well," said Mrs Carruthers, "you can soon alter that."

"It isn't so simple as it sounds," Pamela replied. "I tried at first; but one has to give way. It is all for the benefit of the children. It's no good employing any one like that, and interfering with her authority. She has to be with them always, and I only see them at odd moments."

She broke off with a laugh.

"It's a shame to inflict all this grumbling on you; but I needed an outlet. It wouldn't do to grumble to Herbert because he was so greatly against having a governess. He would say it was what he foresaw, and advise me to get rid of her. I shouldn't like to do that. I always feel easy in my mind about them when I leave them now. She is entirely trustworthy."

"I think I should put my foot down upon that point," Mrs Carruthers advised. "That sort of thing can become annoying. Some people are greedy for authority, and if you give in to them they become arbitrary. If you want the children any hour of the day, have them, whether it is the time for their rest or any other legitimate exercise."

"And spoil their tempers," laughed Pamela.

"Rubbish!" scoffed Mrs Carruthers. "Temper in the human animal develops naturally. One has to spank it out of them. All children are not brought up by rule, you know; it isn't possible in some households. We were dragged up; but I must add that our tempers on the whole did not suffer as a result. Keep their little bodies nourished, and their minds will develop of themselves. The one thing, I suppose, every mother strives to do is to develop her baby on the lines she considers the most admirable; and the baby invariably develops on its own lines, because it is an individual. It is difficult to regard the infant as an individual. We imagine we form its character; but nature forms its character in the embryo stage; we merely advance its development by the aid of our own experience. See more of your children, Pamela, my dear; nothing will ever make up to you, nor to them, the enjoyment you forego in your present separation."

She rose abruptly, and approached Pamela's side. Stooping, she took the wistful face between her hands and kissed it.

"I am a stony-hearted, philosophical lunatic," she said. "Go and put on your hat, you blessed infant, and come out for a walk with me."

Chapter Thirteen.

Miss Maitland had been some months in the house before Arnott became in any degree alive to her actual presence. He met her occasionally coming in or going out. Usually she had the children with her, and a coloured girl in charge of the boy. He always passed them, thankful that politeness demanded nothing further than the raising of his hat. Sometimes he encountered her on the stairs, when he felt constrained to make a remark. But she was exceedingly retiring, and appeared quite as anxious as he was to avoid these encounters. She had a habit of effacing herself when he was at home.

But one day when he had been lunching with some men at his club, and returned unexpectedly early in the afternoon with the intention of running Pamela out to Camps Bay in the motor, he found that Pamela had gone visiting; and Miss Maitland, who supplied this information, ceased amazingly to stand as a mere cog in the wheel of his domestic machinery, and assumed a distinct feminine personality that caught and held his attention. She was, he noted, and felt surprised that he noticed this for the first time, a striking, fine-looking girl.

He had run upstairs to look for Pamela, and was calling for her loudly when quite unexpectedly a door in the corridor opened, and Miss Maitland appeared, closing the door softly behind her, and keeping her hand on the knob.

"The children are asleep," she said, which he recognised was a warning to him not to disturb them.

Instead of feeling annoyed, he stopped short and stared at her apologetically.

"Sorry I was so inconsiderate," he said. "I forgot. Can you tell me where Mrs Arnott is?"

Blanche explained.

"What a bore," he said. "I particularly wanted her."

He surveyed the calm face turned gravely in his direction, with its serene eyes and unsmiling lips, and was amused to see it change colour under his scrutiny. His interest was immediately aroused. She assumed from that moment an individuality that excited his curiosity. Why, he wondered, had he been so entirely unaware of her before?—not unaware of her actual bodily presence in his home, but of her separate existence as a sentient human being,—a feminine human being with possibilities of engaging developments.

He held her for a few minutes in conversation; then, quite pleasantly excited, he went downstairs, and sat on the stoep and smoked until Pamela returned.

Pamela found him in a mood of high good humour, notwithstanding his announcement that he had spent a solitary afternoon, chafing at her absence. The period of solitude had been less irksome than he allowed. She leaned against the rail of the stoep near his chair, and gave an account of her afternoon's doings, which had been fairly dull on the whole.

"I would rather have been motoring," she finished.

Miss Maitland appeared with the children at this moment. She had waited until Pamela returned home, not caring to pass Arnott, for some inexplicable reason, and fully alive to the fact that he was seated on the stoep near the door. It was late for their walk. For the first time since her arrival the rigid rule of regular hours was relaxed.

Pamela looked round in surprise.

"Going out?" she exclaimed, catching up Pamela, the younger, who had flown towards her and flung herself into her arms.

Arnott sat up, regarding the governess under his eyes. She had no look for him.

"Baby slept late," she explained to Pamela. "I thought we might manage a short walk before tea."

"You come too," the little girl pleaded, tugging at Pamela's hand.

"Nonsense!" interposed Arnott. "You have got Miss Maitland. Daddy wants mummy."

The child pouted her disappointment.

"You can have Miss Maitland," she said, with unflattering generosity. "Pamela wants her mummy."

Arnott laughed.

"Suppose I come instead, kiddie?" he suggested.

But his small daughter was decided in her opinions, and unblushingly frank in the expression of them.

"I want mummy," she announced. "I don't want any one else."

"I'll tell you what I will do," he said, rising abruptly, to Pamela's wondering amazement. "The car is all ready for going out I'll take the whole lot for a spin." He tried not to look as though he were conscious of acting in an altogether unprecedented manner, and added: "You can nurse the boy between you."

"That will be jolly," said Pamela.

Little Pamela clapped her hands.

"That will be jolly," she echoed.

"I feel quite the family man," Arnott remarked later, when he had settled Miss Maitland in the back with the children, —an arrangement against which Pamela, the younger, at first protested loudly. She wanted her mummy. Why couldn't Miss Maitland sit in front with daddy?

Pamela touched his arm affectionately as he seated himself beside her and grasped the steering wheel.

"I love you in the rôle," she said softly. "I wish you played it more often."

He laughed constrainedly.

"We'll see how it works," he answered guardedly.

It worked well on the whole. David howled lustily part of the time, for no apparent reason, after the manner of small people; but he ceased his cries when Pamela took him on her lap and coaxed him into a good temper. That hour was the happiest she had spent for a long while. It was the first occasion on which Arnott had taken the children out, or evinced any interest in them whatever. She wondered what impulse had moved him to act in this wholly unexpected and delightful way. She understood him sufficiently to realise that it was an impulse, and entertained no great hope that it would develop into a practice; but even as an isolated instance of parental affection it presented him in a new and more kindly light.

Aware that he was giving her pleasure, Arnott experienced an agreeable sense of virtuous complacency. He speculated upon what the girl in the tonneau was thinking, as she sat in her silent fashion, responding only when necessary to Pamela's ceaseless prattle. He looked round occasionally to make some joking remark to the child, and once he deliberately addressed himself to the governess. She started when he spoke to her, and answered briefly, and with faint embarrassment. After that one attempt at conversation he did not look round again.

"I like going out in the car," remarked little Pamela, when she was lifted out on their return home. "Why don't we go every day?"

"Daddy wouldn't be bothered with such a small fidget every day," he answered. "But you shall go again, if you are good."

"To-morrow?" demanded Pamela.

"We'll see," he returned, and drove the car round to the garage.

Pamela carried the boy upstairs to the nursery, and remained for the nursery tea. Then she changed her dress and went downstairs. Arnott was in the drawing-room when she entered. She went to him and put her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Thank you, dear, for a very happy drive," she said.

He laughed awkwardly.

"Odd ideas of happiness some people have," he commented.

"It gave the children a lot of pleasure," she said. "And it was a change for Miss Maitland. I have often wished to take her in the car, but I haven't liked to suggest it."

"Why not?" he asked.

"I was afraid you might think it a nuisance. It was one of the conditions, you know, that I wasn't to let her get in your way."

"Oh, that!" he returned... "Yes. But you've taken me rather more literally than I intended. She is a very self-effacing

young woman. What on earth does she do with herself? It must be fairly dull for her to be always with the kids. Why don't you have her down for an hour of an evening? ... I don't see why she shouldn't dine with us."

"I don't think that's necessary," she said.

"Just as you like," he answered. "I only thought it would make it brighter for her."

She considered the matter for a second or so, not altogether liking the idea, and half wishing that he had not made the suggestion. A third person sharing their quiet evenings would end finally the pleasant companionable home life which had once meant so much to both of them, but which Pamela was forced to recognise was no longer all it had been. Perhaps the addition of a third person would make the increasing strain of these domestic evenings less apparent, might, by introducing a fresh note, rouse them both from the apathy of indifference into which they were drifting. People could have too much of one another's undiluted society; the presence of a third person, even if sometimes irksome, stimulates the interest afresh. And, as Arnott had remarked, it would certainly be brighter for Blanche.

"If you are sure you don't mind," she said.

"Why should I mind? The girl is harmless enough," he replied. "I don't like the idea of her spending her evenings alone."

"No," Pamela said, perching herself on the arm of his chair, and turning a smiling face to his. "I don't like it either. But I am just a little reluctant to admit her altogether as one of the family. It's going to put a finish to this comfortable state of affairs."

He laughed, and got an arm about her waist.

"I suppose it is," he allowed. "But if you will introduce strange young women into the happy home you must put up with that. It was your doing, remember."

"I know," Pamela assented. "But you must admit, Herbert, that it has been a success."

"I don't deny it," he returned. "So far as I am able to judge, the arrangement has worked towards the greater comfort of the establishment all round. That's one reason why I think we ought to study the girl. At present she is being treated like an upper servant. That won't do. A girl needs some society outside the nursery."

"Very well," agreed Pamela. "We will inaugurate the new system to-morrow."

Accordingly on the morrow Miss Maitland joined them at dinner. Although Arnott himself had suggested, and practically insisted on this extension of privileges, he made very little effort in helping Pamela in the laborious task of sustaining conversation during the meal, or later when they sat on the stoep. The governess occupied herself with some sewing, and Arnott sat under the electric light and read the papers, only very occasionally throwing in a remark. Pamela found the evening very tedious, and was relieved when punctually at nine-thirty Miss Maitland retired. Never very talkative, Miss Maitland's powers of conversation seemed to dry up in Arnott's presence. She seldom looked at him, and never addressed him spontaneously.

"Bit dull, isn't she?" Arnott observed, when she had left them and gone indoors. He dropped his paper on to the floor and yawned. Then he got up. "You don't seem to have the knack of setting her at her ease," he said irritably.

"I don't see what more I can be expected to do," Pamela returned, a little nettled. "She is shy—I think of you. When we are alone she is more companionable."

"Well, I'm going in for a whisky," he said. "Dull people always give me a thirst."

He went inside. Miss Maitland was mounting the stairs as he crossed the hall. He paused at the foot of the stairs and looked after her.

"Good-night,—mouse," he called softly.

She looked back over her shoulder and flushed warmly.

"Good-night," she answered, and gave him one of her rare smiles, and hurried on.

He entered the dining-room, drank off a glass of whisky, and poured himself out a second, which he carried with him on to the stoep and placed in the armhole of his chair. He had quite recovered his good humour. He smiled a trifle self-consciously, and leaned over the back of Pamela's chair, and rallied her on her silence.

"Am I to sit through the rest of the evening with another speechless young woman?" he inquired.

Pamela, who felt unaccountably depressed, made no direct reply to this. Instead she observed:

"Blanche plays wonderfully. Would it bore you if I suggested a little music occasionally? I think she would enjoy it, and it would relieve the strain."

"It wouldn't bore me," he answered. "I'm fond of music when it's good. If she would like to strum, let her. There was a time when you used to sing to me. But I haven't heard you sing for months, and then only when we had people here."

Pamela remembered perfectly. The last time she had sung was the night Dare dined with them.

"You never seemed to care much," she said.

"Not care! You didn't think that when I used to hang over you and the piano on board ship," he laughed.

"Well, you don't take the trouble to hang over the piano any longer," she replied.

He straightened himself, and moved away, frowning impatiently. Why, he wondered, did a woman always demand open demonstration of a man's affection? As a sex they were tiresomely exacting.

"I'll get a gramophone," he said.

Pamela laughed.

"Some one has to hang over that. That will be my job, I suppose?"

"No. I will make myself independent of you. Miss Maitland shall work it."

"It seems," Pamela observed, "that she is to be a person of many avocations,—nurse to the children, housekeeper for me, and companion to you."

"Why not?" he said. "She'll find the last job the most amusing."

"If this evening was a sample of your mutual interest, I should doubt that," Pamela retorted. "I never knew you could be so absolutely wooden. You did not make the least attempt to be agreeable. After all, it was your idea to have her down."

"It's no use, Pam," he answered coolly. "I refuse to make a social effort in my own home after eight o'clock. I expect to be amused,—or at least left in peace. I didn't lay myself out to be entertaining when I proposed her joining us. She will fit in, in time. Don't you worry."

He raised his glass, and took a long drink.

"If one is obliged to admit the stranger within one's gate, I prefer she should err on the quiet side," he added. He recalled the swift, surprised flush, and the smile which the girl, pausing on the landing, had given him; and he wondered whether in her own room she was thinking, as he was, of that unexpected encounter, and the confidential half-whisper of his murmured good-night. It had, he felt, established a sort of understanding between them. Odd, he reflected, that he had lived in the same house with her for months, and only now discovered in her that quality of the essential feminine which made her an interesting problem to the male mind.

Chapter Fourteen.

It seemed as though Arnott, after years of indifference, had abruptly awoke to his duties as a father. He began to take a quite extraordinary interest in his children. Exercise in the car ceased to be an astounding treat and became an almost daily custom. He even penetrated into the nursery, usually when the children were in bed. He bought sweets for them, and chose this hour for presenting his gifts.

Pamela looked on, puzzled. She refrained from any comment; she was on the whole pleased; but she was not confident as to the staying qualities of this sudden show of interest; and she awaited developments with a doubt as to his entire sincerity in the new pose. Not for a long time did she connect the change in his attitude with the presence of Miss Maitland in the nursery. It spoke eloquently for Arnott's discretion that Pamela was so blind to his intimacy with her children's governess; had he been at all indiscreet in his conduct before the children they would have carried tales. It was in order to avoid the disconcerting evidence of sharp eyes and small ears that he usually visited the nursery when they were in bed.

During these visits he contrived to snatch a few minutes alone with Blanche in the playroom, having previously closed the door between it and the night-nursery. These interviews began by being entirely commonplace. Arnott was carefully feeling his way; he had no desire to precipitate matters; and the girl was shy. He was satisfied that this was not a pose; the girl really was shy. She was also, he perceived, pleasantly flattered by his attentions.

He began his overtures towards a greater familiarity by addressing her by fanciful names. He bought her elaborate boxes of chocolates, which he gave her with some jesting remark about all little girls liking sweets. One day he gave her a brooch. Blanche looked utterly confused at receiving this present, and pushed it back hastily into his hand.

"Oh, no, please! I can't take it," she said.

For a moment he looked disconcerted.

"Why not?" he asked.

The rich blood was showing under her skin in the way he enjoyed seeing it, and the dark, mystery-eyes, as he called them, were lowered in quick embarrassment. She was obviously much distressed. His annoyance vanished.

"Please don't think me ungracious," she pleaded; "but I would rather you didn't give me things like that."

He slipped the trinket into his pocket, and possessed himself of her hand.

"Then I won't," he said. "But I am sorry you won't let me."

He hesitated for a moment, studying her downcast face; then he bent forward and kissed her lips. She looked more confused than before, but she did not draw back. He kissed her again.

"Just to show that you are not vexed," he said.

After which he released her, and went downstairs with an air of elation, and his pulses beating at a great rate with pleasurable excitement. He walked on to the stoep, whistling softly. She didn't seem to mind, he reflected. He wondered why he had not kissed her before.

That evening, when she came downstairs, he spoke very little to her, and studiously avoided looking at her. She played accompaniments for Pamela part of the time; and he sat alone on the stoep and smoked and watched them through the French windows. Once Pamela put her arm round the girl's shoulders, and remained in this position while she sang. Inexplicably her attitude jarred Arnott. The girl sat very stiffly. She did not, he observed, once lift her eyes from the sheet of music she was reading.

Shortly before her usual time for retiring he left his seat, and went upstairs, and waited on the landing until she appeared. He heard the drawing-room door open and close. Then the piano sounded again, and Pamela's voice, rich, and full, and sweet, came to his ears as he stood there in the gloom of the landing, listening for Blanche's light ascending footfall.

Presently she appeared, and stood, a dusky figure in the half light, her simple white dress revealing soft full throat and rounded arms, and a surprisingly graceful form. She paused, startled at seeing him there, and instinctively threw out a protesting hand. He caught her to him, and kissed her passionately, holding her strained against his breast.

"Oh, don't!" she gasped, a little frightened at the steel-like pressure of his arms.

She was trembling from head to foot. Never had she been kissed like this in all her life before. His passion scorched her, terrified her, left her quivering with shame and mortification. And yet she was not angry. These hot kisses raining upon her lips, his kisses earlier in the day, roused in her the desire to be kissed. An unemotional, loveless girlhood had repressed, but not slain, the inherent qualities of a passionate nature; Arnott's virile love-making was calling these repressed emotions to life. She wanted to be loved; she wanted to be kissed; wanted to be made to feel that she counted in some one's life,—was important,—necessary to some one.

At the moment of offering her feeble protest, when she yet yielded to his caresses, it did not occur to her that Arnott had no right to make her of account in his life. That aspect of the case appealed to her later, when she lay in bed unable to sleep for the unwholesome excitement which fired her brain and quickened the beating of her heart. When she considered Arnott in the light of a married man, and realised that his making love to her was an insult, it sickened her. She felt angry—angry with him, and fiercely jealous of Pamela. She hated Pamela,—hated her for having all the things which she desired and had not got,—hated her for her fair smiling prettiness, her kindness, her utter lack of appreciation—as it seemed to Blanche—of all the good she possessed. Why should Pamela have everything, and she only the stealthy kisses of a man whose kisses were an insult?

As she felt again in imagination the close pressure of his lips upon hers, the grip of his arms, which had hurt her, frightened her, and yet given her a thrill of sensuous pleasure, she turned her face to the pillow and pressed her mouth against its coolness and cried weakly. How dared he kiss her like that? ... How dared he endeavour to make her love him when he could never be anything closer in her life than at present? It was cruel and mean of him...

Yet, despite her realisation of his baseness, she could not hate the man. Already he had succeeded beyond his expectation in rousing in her a hungry craving for him, which, if he persisted in his selfish persecution, could only end disastrously for her. And he had no intention to desist. The game which he had started idly for his own amusement was becoming absorbingly interesting. That was how he regarded the affair. In his ungenerous pursuit of amusement he lost sight of the girl's youth, of her helpless position in his household, exposed to the evil influence of his attentions, and unable to protect herself save by giving up her post, which he was comfortably assured from the moment she suffered his caresses she would not have the strength of mind to do.

He was not in love with her. He was merely gratifying a sensual impulse to take advantage of the moment. It seemed absurd, he told himself, to have a girl, eager for initiation, at hand and refrain from using the opportunity. She could stop him if she chose.

When she broke away from him on the landing, he went downstairs and returned quietly to his seat on the stoep. Pamela was still singing. She ceased presently, and closed the piano and joined him.

"I believe you were asleep," she said, and perched herself on his knee.

His eyes flashed open instantly. He had been leaning back with them closed, lost in a comfortable reverie; her unexpected action startled him into sudden alertness.

"Something very near it," he admitted. "I believe, myself, I've been dreaming."

"Pleasant dreams?" she demanded.

He took her chin in his hand.

"Confused," he answered. "I'm not fully awake now... Am I an old fogey, Pam?"

"No," she replied, smiling. "But you are not exactly a boy."

"Not a dashing hero," he rejoined. "Then my dreams were deceptive. Dreaming after dinner suggests age. I'll have to buck up."

"Buck up now, and talk to me," Pamela said. "You've been very slow this evening."

"Have I?" He took hold of her wrist and spanned it with his fingers. "You are growing abominably thin," he remarked irrelevantly.

Involuntarily, he compared her slimness with Blanche Maitland's generous lines, and decided that thinness was unbecoming.

"I never was plump," Pamela answered calmly, quite satisfied with her own proportions, and unconscious of his comparison.

"No... 'A rag and a bone and a hank of hair' ... How does the thing go?"

"I don't think I want to hear any more of it," she said.

He laughed.

"Then don't grow any thinner. You are getting to be all angles."

She got off his knee and took a chair some little distance from him.

"These unflattering remarks are not soothing," she said. "I think I prefer your silence."

Arnott felt carelessly amused.

"You needn't get ratty," he returned. "It is only concern for your well-being that is responsible for my criticisms. The fact is, you need a change, Pam. I have half a mind to shut up the house and cart the lot of you off to the seaside for a fortnight—Muizenberg, or somewhere handy, so that I can get in every day and see that things here are going on all right. Miss Maitland could look after the kiddies, and you and I could motor around, and forget all about Wynberg. What do you say to my plan?"

Pamela sat forward in her chair, her face alight with pleasure.

"Oh! that would be good," she said. "I should love it? Let it be Muizenberg, Herbert. The sea is so safe and warm there. You could teach Pamela to swim. She hasn't a scrap of fear."

The suggestion took Arnott's fancy. It occurred to him that he might derive a good deal of pleasure in this way. Surf bathing at Muizenberg was noted. He would have them all in the sea, and teach the governess as well as Pamela aquatic accomplishments.

"Then that's settled," he said. "I will secure rooms at the hotel before the holiday rush. If we get bored, we can return and leave the children there."

"I shan't get bored," she said. "I shall sit on the sands all day and revel in idleness. You can't think what a joy it will be to me to have the children always. I shan't want to go motoring. One can do that any time."

"You shall please yourself," he returned with unusual good humour. "It's your holiday. If you want to build castles in the sand, I'll help you. You must get yourself a bathing dress—we must all have bathing dresses, and we will become amphibious."

"I really believe," observed Pamela, looking at him with a quiet smile, "that you are actually keen on this adventure."

"I am," he replied. "I told you I was dreaming myself youthful again. I want to roll in the surf, and do all manner of foolish things... Why have we never done these things before?"

"It never occurred to me that you would agree to an annual seaside trip," she answered. "And I shouldn't care to go without you. It is only lately," she added thoughtfully, "that you have shown any disposition to be bothered with the children. You wouldn't let yourself get interested in them before; and now I believe you realise that you have missed a lot. They are dear wee things."

"Oh! they are jolly little cards," he answered carelessly. "I am grateful to them in a sense. They are the *raison d'être* for this excursion after all. An old fogey like myself couldn't submit to the indignity of paddling in the surf without the legitimate excuse of the necessity for his presence in order to smack the little Arnotts with their own spades when they become unruly. It won't be all heaven, I expect."

Pamela spent the next few days in preparing for the wonderful holiday, assisted by her small excited family, and a silent and detached governess, who looked on, while Pamela shopped extensively for every one, with a furtive disapproval in her dark eyes, as though disliking the idea of this change to the sea, and her compulsory participation in it.

When Pamela presented her with a smart bathing costume she at first declined the gift.

"I can't swim," she protested. "And I'm afraid of the sea. I shouldn't like to bathe—really."

"Oh! but," said Pamela, feeling unaccountably disappointed, "we shall all bathe. You won't be afraid with Mr Arnott; he will teach you to swim in no time. It will be half the fun."

Blanche blushed at this suggestion that Arnott should teach her to swim, and looked with greater disfavour than ever at the ridiculous garment in Pamela's hand.

"I'm too big a coward to learn," she said. "I should hate it. Please don't ask me."

Miss Maitland was, Pamela decided, a most unsatisfactory girl to deal with.

She told Arnott of the difficulty, and held up the amazing garment of navy alpaca and white braid for his inspection.

"It is so pretty," she said. "And she looked at it as though it were indecent."

He laughed.

"As a sex you are all more or less mock modest," he announced. "You will half undress of an evening, and blush to be discovered in a perfectly decorous petticoat. Pack the thing in with your own clothes, and I'll undertake to state when she sees every one else in the water she will yearn to get in too. We will cure her of her distaste for salt water."

And so the bathing dress went to Muizenberg in Pamela's trunk.

Chapter Fifteen.

With their arrival in Muizenberg Pamela took entirely upon herself the care of the children. She informed Miss Maitland that she was to regard her stay there in the light of a holiday; she was to go and come as she chose, and leave the children with her.

"But that won't be any holiday for you," objected Blanche.

"It is my holiday being with them," Pamela answered.

Robbed of her occupation, Miss Maitland sat on the sands alone and read a book; while Pamela, with the aid of Maggie, the coloured nurse, bathed and put to bed two very weary and rather fretful little people, tired out with the excitement of the day, with a surfeit of undiluted sunlight, and strong salt air. They had rebelled at going to bed. The boy had howled his hardest when he was forcibly removed from the beach. They had been naughty over tea, and cross at being undressed. Pamela had to be coaxed into saying her prayers. But eventually they were put into bed, and within five minutes of being there were sleeping soundly.

Arnott came in when they were asleep, and expressed surprise at finding Pamela there. She raised a cautious finger.

"Why don't you let Miss Maitland do this?" he asked.

"Because I like to do it myself," she replied in an undertone.

"Aren't you coming out?"

"No."

He left the room quietly, and strolled down to the beach.

The sun had set, and the turquoise of the sea had deepened; its waves no longer shone with glancing lights. The long stretch of white sand was almost deserted; one or two people loitered on it, and down by the water's edge, watching the incoming tide, the solitary figure of a girl in a blue linen frock lent an unexpected touch of harmonious colour against the silvery background of sand. Arnott's glance fell on the girl, and, his interest quickening at sight of her, he hastened his steps. She looked up at his approach, flushed warmly, and made a movement as if to rise. He stayed her.

"Don't move," he said, and dropped on the sands beside her. "You looked deliciously lazy. What were you pondering over when I interrupted that deep train of thought?"

She had been thinking about him, but she did not say so. She kept her gaze fixed on the long waves, rolling in in ceaseless regularity and sweeping lazily up the beach, as she answered:

"I was thinking how beautiful it is here."

"So you like Muizenberg?" he said. "I hoped you would. Doesn't the sea look jolly?"

"I'm afraid of the sea," she said slowly.

He was watching her intently, admiring the rich colour under her skin, and the way in which the little tendrils of dark hair curled over the small ears, admiring too the long line of her shoulder, and the soft contour of the partly averted face. At her admission he suddenly smiled.

"So I heard," he replied. "You must get better acquainted with it, and then you will lose your fear. I brought the gown along in my suit case. We will christen it to-morrow."

"No," she said, startled, and flashed a quick, almost terrified look at him. There was a strong appeal in her tones. "I don't wish to bathe—really."

"Not to please me—Blanche?" he said, and dropped on his elbow on the sand and possessed himself of her hand.

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Some one will see us."

"There is no one to see," he answered, with a cautious look about him. "What a timid little mouse it is!" He ran his hand up the loose sleeve of her blouse and caressed her elbow with his fingers. "Your skin is like satin," he said, and smiled into her shrinking eyes. "You mustn't be angry with me, Blanche. I have a very great affection for you. And I want you to be very happy with us,—I want you to consider yourself as one of the family. What would you say to my adopting you?"

"That you are talking nonsense," she answered.

He laughed quietly.

"I'll adopt you informally," he said. "We needn't particularise the relationship,—only you must understand that it places me in authority. We will start with the order for sea-bathing. To-morrow I give you your first swimming lesson."

She made no verbal response to this. With her disengaged hand she played nervously with the sand, piling it in small heaps, and scattering these to pile them anew. He watched her in idle amusement.

"She is going to be good," he murmured.

"I think," Blanche said abruptly, "I ought to go in now. The children will be in bed."

"They are asleep," he replied. "You know quite well you aren't wanted. There is half an hour yet before we need bother about returning. Talk to me, you silent person. Give me the benefit of all those repressed thoughts of yours. Whenever I watch you, you are always dreaming. Do you never tell your dreams?"

"They aren't worth telling," she answered coldly, with difficulty restraining a desire to cry.

She wanted to beg him to desist from tormenting her, to leave her alone, to ignore her as he used to do. This persistent persecution worried her. She was no match for a man of his years and ripe experience. She was attracted by his personality, and at the same time afraid of him, a dangerous combination of emotions for a girl of twenty-two.

"I would like to judge that for myself," he said. "I incline to believe I should find those day dreams interesting. Is it love you think about so much?"

"No," she answered bluntly. "Love doesn't come my way. I have no time for it."

"It seems to me," he said, "that it comes very much your way... You are turning your shoulder on it now. Come! let me see your face—dear."

"You must not talk to me like that," Blanche exclaimed with sudden passion. "You would not dare if your wife were here."

"My wife!" he echoed, and laughed. "Thank God! she isn't here. I don't want any one just now but you,—you, with the sea and the salt wind and that delicious shy look in your eyes... You aren't angry, really? I so want to enjoy my holiday—here with you. I don't believe you are angry, but I think you are a little afraid of me."

She kept her face averted, and gazed steadily out to sea. The waves were sweeping up the wet sands until they almost reached her feet. When they came near enough to force her to move, she determined that she would then return to the hotel. She felt that she could not, while he still held her hand, make an effort of herself to rise.

"Yes, I am afraid," she muttered. "I am afraid."

Her lip quivered, and the hand lying unresponsively in his was icy cold. He gripped it hard.

"You need not be afraid," he said. "I have only a very kindly feeling for you,—a tender feeling. I want to give you pleasure. One day you will understand. I do not wish you to be frightened of me. I want you to trust me. There isn't the slightest reason why we shouldn't be the closest of chums."

"There is every reason," she answered; "the secrecy of it alone proves that. You dare not give me your friendship openly."

"But it's the secrecy which makes it so jolly," he insisted.

"Scuffling in the dark!" she said scornfully.

He fondled her hand.

"It isn't dark now," he said.

"No. But there is no one to heed us. Presently we shall go back. I shall walk on ahead,—or follow—whichever suits you; and for the rest of the evening we shall be distantly formal." She faced him with an expression of hard resentment in her eyes. "You may find it amusing," she added bitterly; "but to me it is only humiliating. I wish you would leave me alone."

He sat up, and drawing his knees up, clasped them with his arms.

"Perverse!" he murmured, watching the encroachment of the waves with a seemingly absorbed interest, and evading the girl's scornful, accusative gaze. "And I believed she was going to be sweet... My dear girl," he exclaimed,

suddenly facing about, "you have made two misstatements which it behoves me to correct. We are not going to spend a formal evening,—we are going for a walk in the moonlight. You are not going to precede me, nor will I permit you to follow me off the beach now. We return together. It would be far more indiscreet to pursue the tactics you have laid down, as it will be far pleasanter to adopt mine. Better leave yourself in my hands, my dear. My knowledge of the world is more profound than yours. The greater length of time I have lived in it justifies that assumption. And my experience of life has taught me that to deny oneself a single pleasure for the sake of some foolish scruple is wasteful; it only brings regret, and profits one nothing. The moral is obvious."

"That is an unworkable theory," she answered.

"Not so," he returned. "Take our own case, for instance. We enjoy being together. What do we gain by denying ourselves that pleasure? Nothing. What do we lose by making the most of these opportunities? Nothing. It is absurd to lead a life of suppressions, to deny one's self enjoyment, for purely imaginary reasons. I delight in your friendship. I like you, your quiet, dark-eyed thoughtfulness. I think you would be kind to me, only you won't allow yourself to be kind. Why? Can't you see that I stand in need of your friendship?"

"There is your wife," she reminded him.

He made an impatient sound, and looked annoyed.

"Haven't you discovered yet that the children are more to her than I am?" he demanded. "I don't like second place. I want to stand first in some one's life. I have no right to say such things to you, of course. But that is how I feel." He turned to her quickly, and spoke in swift impassioned tones. "Blanche, be a little kind to me. It will cost you nothing, and it will mean so much to me... Will you try?"

"You don't consider me," she said, in a low, tremulous voice. "Can't you see how difficult it is for me to refuse? ... I made a great mistake in ever allowing you to kiss me. I blame myself greatly for that I didn't consider... Be generous, and leave me alone."

Her appeal would have moved any one less deliberately selfish to desist; its effect upon Arnott, to whom it appeared tantamount to a confession of weakness, was merely gratifying. He felt pleasantly confident, and was satisfied for the present to rest at this stage in the development of his pursuit.

It was beginning to matter to him more than he realised, the subjugation of this girl's will to his own. The quest he had begun in idle amusement was becoming a serious business; it was a game no longer, but a matter of deadly earnest. Its very importance to him was hourly increasing her value and desirability in his eyes.

He rose without a word, and offered her his hand and assisted her to her feet. They tramped back over the fine white sand in silence. The girl walked with her gaze fixed on the far horizon, where one blue expanse melted into the other as sea and sky took on the grey shades of evening. Her calm face masked successfully the whirl of emotions which stirred her, but the eyes, staring out to sea, were eloquent of many unquiet thoughts.

When they left the beach and stepped upon the firm road, he broke the silence abruptly.

"Don't be too hard on me, Blanche," he said. "I'm a lonely sort of fellow. You fit into the blanks, somehow. I've been happier since you came into my life. Don't begrudge me any scrap of comfort I derive from your society, my dear."

She made no response to this. She crossed the road with heightened colour and entered the hotel. He followed her, and stood at the foot of the stairs, looking after her as she slowly mounted and passed on to her room. Then he went to his own room to change.

He surveyed himself in the glass, and twisted the ends of his moustache, and smiled complacently. The glass told him that he had passed his first youth; but it further assured him that he was still a good-looking man, and that the lines which showed between his brows and about the corners of his eyes, added the weight of a matured dignity which might very well prove attractive in the eyes of a girl. A girl would naturally feel flattered by attentions from him. Blanche, he knew, was flattered. She was interested in him; but she was fighting against the influence he exercised over her. When she ceased to fight she would prove an easy conquest, he told himself.

Chapter Sixteen.

Men of Arnott's type are most dangerous on account of their unscrupulousness. A man who will commit bigamy because he recognises that the virtue of the woman he desires is proof against any relationship save the honourably married state, is capable of the further infamy of unfaithfulness to the woman he has wronged. Faithfulness is an unknown quality in such natures; it is at variance with every other predominant quality that goes to the making of such men. Arnott was already unfaithful to Pamela in his thoughts. His sudden infatuation for the governess of his children developed surprisingly until it became an obsession. In his preference for her society ordinary caution was disregarded, and little by little the last decent pretences were allowed to slip away.

Pamela began to be dimly aware of certain things during their stay at Muizenberg. Arnott spent a great deal of time in Miss Maitland's company. He took her motoring, while Pamela remained with the children, and in the evenings, when she and the children were at tea, they went for long walks together, returning only in time for dinner. Pamela thought little of this at first. She had elected to be with the children, and had refused to motor with Herbert; she was pleased when he asked Blanche to accompany him. But after a while these excursions became a daily practice; the morning bathe was merely a pretext for teaching Blanche to swim Arnott pleased himself without any reference whatever to Pamela's wishes or convenience. She felt indignant. It was time, she decided, to remonstrate with him on the impropriety of paying such marked attention to the girl. She particularly disliked his conduct towards her in the

water. After all, Blanche was in a sense in her charge; she was responsible for her while she remained in her family.

She informed Arnott on one occasion, when they were alone together, that he spent too much time with Miss Maitland, and was unnecessarily familiar. She objected to his addressing her by her Christian name. He lost his temper at that. He didn't see any harm in it, he told her; she often called her Blanche.

"That's different," Pamela answered. "It is scarcely a reason for your doing so. I don't like it."

After that he was rather more careful, and indulged in these familiarities only when he felt certain that Pamela could not overhear. But his conduct in other respects continued to affront her, and spoilt her enjoyment entirely of the holiday which had promised so much pleasure at the beginning. She felt only anxious to return home. Had it not been for the disappointment it would have occasioned the children, she would have curtailed the holiday.

When the fortnight was nearly expired, Arnott proposed remaining at Muizenberg for another week, but Pamela refused to do this. He did not urge her. He had put forward the suggestion in an offhand, self-conscious manner; and when she objected, he merely remarked that he thought it would be nice for the children, and then dropped the subject. But her refusal incensed him. Opposition to his wishes always made him angry. It exasperated him to be forced to submit to her decision; but he swallowed his annoyance, and said nothing.

He went for a walk with Blanche, and confided to her that he was sick of his life. He derived immense consolation from her sympathetic silence, and the return pressure of her fingers when he sought her hand,—the first time she had responded in this way. There being no one in sight, he stooped and kissed her.

"You can't imagine what a help you are to me," he said.

"I am glad," she answered. "No one has ever wanted my help before."

"I want it," he said.

"Just now,—because you are unhappy. But it won't always be like that."

"It will," he insisted. "I shall always want you. You are necessary to me. You make life bearable."

"I don't think it very likely that I shall be with you much longer," she said.

"Why?" he asked quickly.

She shook her head, and gave him one of her sphinx-like smiles.

"I can't explain," she replied. "But I think it will be as I say."

"You don't want to leave us?" he asked.

She hesitated, and looked straight ahead along the hot white road. The expression of her face was difficult to read; the man, watching it closely, learned nothing from it. He was conscious only of the sudden hardening of the lines about her mouth.

"Do I?" she murmured, rather to herself than to him, and added slowly:—"I don't know."

"That's nonsense," he exclaimed impatiently. "You must know whether you are happy with us."

"I am not happy," she returned, without looking at him. "I don't think it should be difficult for you to realise that... I don't think mine is a happy nature," she continued in low, dispassionate tones. "I can't remember being ever really happy—as most people are happy—even as a child. There has been little enough of love or brightness in my life."

"I want to show you something of both," he said. "I could, if you would let me. I care a lot for you, you know."

She smiled drearily.

"That's not of any use to me," she replied... "You know that."

"I'll wait," he said confidently. "You'll change your mind about that some day."

The sun was sinking low towards the west, disappearing in a crimson glory which reflected its red glow in their faces, and splashed the girl's white skirt with vivid colour. She stared at the dying splendour of the day with discontented eyes, which read in the vision of this royal withdrawal the melancholy inevitableness of destiny,—the futility of striving against the combined forces of nature and habit and inclination. Why, as Arnott argued, should one refuse what life offered from some unprofitable idea of right? Life had offered her so little: the only gladness she had known came to her through this man's disloyal affection. Nothing could result from their intercourse. Already it caused her more pain than pleasure. But the unwholesome flattery of his attentions held her captive to the intoxicating excitement of the senses. Each new licence he permitted himself, against which she offered the vain resistance of a half-hearted remonstrance, left her more unguarded to his persistent attack. She despised herself for accepting his caresses, for allowing him to talk to her as he did. Always she resolved that each time should be the last; and on the next occasion she yielded to him again. When the mind becomes subordinated to the senses moral victory is impossible.

"Let us rest here a while," Arnott said.

He drew her aside from the road, and spread his coat for her under the shade of a tree. He seated himself beside her,

and smoked and talked disconnectedly about himself,—of the aimlessness of his life, of his unrealised hopes, his disappointments, and the unsatisfying nature of his married life. He did not speak to her of love; he contented himself with trying to arouse her sympathy, and to place the disloyalty of his conduct in a less condemnatory light. He was the misunderstood, unappreciated husband, whose sole function in his wife's eyes was to provide her with the agreeable and comfortable things of life.

If this description was not altogether consistent with the home life as she had observed it when she first came to live with them, Blanche ascribed the discrepancy to her want of perception, or to the decent deceptions he had practised in order to keep up before the world a pretence of domestic amiability. She was convinced he was quite sincere in what he told her. He was, as a matter of fact, talking himself into a belief in Pamela's coldness. He began to feel genuinely sorry for himself in the rôle of the unappreciated husband divorced from the sympathies of an indifferent wife. Pamela was indifferent of late, he reflected; she had grown strangely independent of him.

"You see how it is?" he said, and gazed appealingly into the dark calm eyes that were watching him in wondering earnestness, while their owner listened compassionately to this tale of married infelicity. "It's all the children with her. I don't count in the ordinary sense. God knows why I married! I've half a mind to chuck it—to disappear. There are times when I feel things can't go on like this much longer. A man hates being thwarted. That's what I am,—thwarted continually."

He dug his heel into the ground and uprooted little tufts of grass and kicked them irritably aside.

"If it wasn't for you," he said, "I couldn't stick it. You are so sweet and understanding and considerate. When I am with you I can let myself out, and that eases the strain. Don't you ever marry, Blanche," he added abruptly. "It's the very devil to be tied hand and foot for life... the very devil."

"I am never likely to have the opportunity," she answered in her cool, indifferent manner. "I don't get on with men. They always want to be amused, and I have nothing to say to them. No man, save you, has ever troubled to talk to me."

"I'm glad of that," he said. "It's selfish of me; but I like to feel that I have your undisputed friendship. I'm a monopolist. A woman who held me alone in her thoughts could have the best of me,—the whole of me. I would give up everything for her."

"I suppose most men think that of themselves," observed Blanche. "But a man's world holds other things than love—a woman's world also, for that matter, though it is not generally considered to. No person gets the whole of another person; at most one only shares."

"That's a frigid philosophy," he said. "You are too young to be cynical."

"I am young only in years," she answered. "I've never had any youth. I don't know what it is to feel girlish. All my life has been spent in looking after other people's babies, with an insufficient education to fit me for anything else. That sort of life doesn't tend to make one youthful."

"It's a rotten shame," he declared. "I'd like to take you out of it, and give you a right good time. I'd teach you how to be young."

"I believe you could," she said, and smiled suddenly. "Do you know what I covet," she asked abruptly, "more than anything in the world? Money." She emitted a bitter little laugh. "Now, confess, you don't think that altogether nice of me."

"Well, I don't know," he replied. "Life without money would be fairly dull. I had rather you had owned to a more feminine desire; it would seem more natural."

"Not really," she contradicted. "Where will you find a woman who will marry a poor man if a richer offers? Every one wants wealth. It is the only thing which gives one power, and is never disappointing. If one is wealthy one can snap one's fingers at the world."

"By Jove!" he muttered.

He looked at her oddly, removing the cigar from his mouth and waving aside the smoke rings for his better observation of the intent, inscrutable face, which in its earnest concentration appeared wholly unaware of his scrutiny and the criticism in his eyes. He was busy taking stock of her, summing up from this unexpected admission to the secrecy of her innermost thoughts, the nature of this surprisingly new feminine type who imagined herself symbolic of all womanhood. Like himself, she was thorough egoist, hugging to her embittered, discontented soul the sense of her own importance and the world's callous neglect. All the submissiveness, the gentle deferential manner which had won for her Mrs Carruthers' patronage, and the confidence of Pamela, fell from her like a soft garment which has concealed effectively the deformities it cloaked. The passionate, hungry, dissatisfied soul of the girl was bared to the man's gaze. He recognised her true self for the first time, and smiled to himself at the revelation. He took pleasure in the knowledge that he was a wealthy man.

"If a rich man offered, I suppose you would marry him?" he said, brutally outspoken.

She did not resent the grossness of the question, neither did she give him a direct answer. She plucked the head from a wild flower growing in the grass, and pulled it to pieces abstractedly while she talked.

"Wealth, when it is a personal possession, brings one absolute power," she said slowly. "When one benefits through another's wealth one can only enjoy what it gives. If I had money of my own, I should be glad; but I shall never have

it. If I were a man I would get it—somehow.”

He laughed.

“That kind of reckless ambition leads men occasionally into awkward scrapes,” he said. “Finance with a disregard for the methods of acquirement is folly. Your feminine logic disqualifies you for the profession.”

She looked at him a little contemptuously.

“A man always considers a woman a fool in business matters,” she said.

“You’ve a good deal as a sex to learn yet,” he returned, unmoved.

“Ah, well!” She threw away the petals of the flower and stood up. “It’s all idle talk, anyway. I suppose if I had even a moderate fortune I’d do as other women occasionally do, invest it in something absolutely safe.” She glanced at his recumbent figure, and at the coat lying on the ground. “If we don’t turn back, we shall be late; and Mrs Arnott will be displeased with me... I am sorry my holiday is drawing to an end.”

“So am I,” he said.

He picked up his coat, and vainly endeavoured to shake out the creases.

“It tells a tale,” he said.

Blanche held it for him while he got into it. She straightened the collar and pressed it into shape. He swung round suddenly and caught her round the waist and kissed her.

“One day,” he said, still holding her with his arm, “you shall have a right royal holiday, and do as much spending as your avarice dictates. I’d enjoy being your banker.”

She flushed hotly and withdrew from the encircling arm.

“You must never say a thing like that to me again,” she said.

Arnott merely smiled. The cloak once discarded can never be resumed as an effective disguise. He had summed her up in his mind and placed her to his entire satisfaction. She was no more sincere and no less vulnerable than the rest of her sex. Arnott held women cheaply in his thoughts, as men of his disposition are wont to do. The only woman whose cold virtue had opposed his libertine nature was his wife in England; and he hated her memory even.

Chapter Seventeen.

That night Blanche sat up late in the little bedroom leading out from the room where the children slept. She sat at the open window, leaning with her arms on the sill, looking out at the sea. The moon silvered the waters and touched the lazy waves where they folded over before breaking upon the sands with a white darting flame, like liquid fire glancing from wave to wave. The murmur of the sea was in her ears, and a warm salt breeze blew in through the opening and stirred the heavy tresses of dark hair that, unloosened, fell about her bare shoulders in becoming disarray. Seen thus, with the light of the moon upon it, the calm face, in its dark setting, was strangely alluring, almost disturbingly beautiful. The discontent in the sombre eyes, the weary droop of her pose, lent a pathos that harmonised with the surroundings, with the serene lonely beauty of the night, and the restless murmur of the sea.

Beneath the outward quiet of her bearing, a ferment of passionate emotions stirred incessantly. The girl’s spirit was in fierce revolt; all the pride in her nature was up in arms. Certain things which Arnott had said to her on their walk that evening brought the angry blood surging to her cheeks merely to recall. She realised clearly that to remain in her present position in his household and keep her self-respect was impossible; to do so after what had passed were to give him the right to insult her. And yet she did not want to leave. The man exercised a hypnotic fascination over her. He was the only man who had ever made love to her,—who possessed the power to quicken her pulses, and bring a gladness and a softened look into her eyes. She believed she loved him. In an undisciplined, passionate way she did love him. He satisfied the hunger-ache in her heart. He was the sole human being to discover in her qualities to admire and like. No one, man or woman, had found her sufficiently attractive to desire her friendship. Blanche hated her own sex, and for the greater part despised men. For Arnott she experienced a kind of shrinking respect. She admired his strength and virility, his temperamental and intellectual force; even his position as a man of wealth and social standing appealed to the latent ambition of her avaricious nature. Because of these advantages which she enjoyed as his wife, she envied Pamela bitterly.

In the next room the boy awoke and broke into fitful crying at finding himself alone. The girl frowned impatiently, but she did not move immediately from her position at the window. The Arnotts’ room was immediately opposite, with only the narrow space of the landing separating the bedroom doors. If the children cried in the night-time it was not her business to attend to them. Nevertheless, as the sobbing continued, she roused herself and went softly into the room, and bent over the child’s bed, across which the moonlight fell wanly, bathing the little rounded limbs in its white light. Blanche picked up the sheet which had fallen to the floor and spread it over the boy. Her face, as she hung over him, and patted the tiny shoulder soothingly, was infinitely womanly. The child was only half awake, and at her touch, lulled into a sense of security by her presence, he sunk quickly back into slumber.

As the sobbing died away the door of the room opened and Arnott entered. Seeing the girl there, he closed the door softly behind him and advanced to the bed and stood beside it, watching her as she bent over the child, with the moonlight falling upon her, revealing the white arms and bare shoulders, and the disarray of her hair. She had taken

off her dress because the night was oppressive; her deshabelle, and the consciousness of his gaze brought the hot colour to her cheeks. She straightened herself, and, satisfied that the child slept, turned and faced him in quick embarrassment.

"Why are you here?" she whispered. "You shouldn't come in here. Go back."

"I heard the child cry," he answered. "I didn't suppose I should find you here. Why are you not in bed?"

"I couldn't rest," she said. "I was sitting at my window looking out at the sea. Then the boy awoke... You shouldn't have come in. Your wife—"

"She is asleep," he returned... "Besides, what does it matter?"

He made a movement towards her, but she drew back quickly.

"Blanche!" he muttered.

She swept the hair from her face with a weary gesture, and stood, a drooping, dejected figure in the dim light, regarding the man with cold, resentful eyes.

"You are making life very hard for me," she said. "Why don't you leave me alone? To-day you have made me almost hate you. You said things which made me mad."

"I love you," he whispered sullenly. "I can't help that, can I?"

"*Love!*" The scorn in her voice stung him. She pointed to the closed door. "In pity's name, go now, before you compromise me utterly. Let your love show that much consideration for me."

Without a word he turned and left the room, and she heard him enter his own room and shut the door softly behind him.

Cautious as had been his movements, Pamela was fully aroused. She lifted herself in bed, and surveyed him as he entered with wide, surprised eyes: their regard disconcerted him enormously. He had not anticipated her wakefulness; and he lied awkwardly in answer to her inquiries. She lay back again on the pillow without making any response. He wondered how long she had been awake, and whether she had heard the opening and shutting of the children's door. He would have been wiser, he decided, had he made a truthful statement of his excursion; the unconvincing falsehood had suggested a sinister motive for his midnight wandering.

For neither Blanche nor Pamela was there any further sleep; Arnott alone slumbered dreamlessly throughout the hot hours of the brief night.

The following day they left Muizenberg. They did not return in the order in which they had arrived. Arnott motored home alone. He left earlier than the others. At breakfast he announced his intention of starting immediately, and asked Pamela if she was driving with him. To his immense relief she decided to return by train with the children. Although no reference had been made to the previous night, he was uncomfortably aware that he was convicted of lying. He resented this. He was angry with himself for having told that unnecessary lie; he was more angry with Pamela for having, as he realised she had done, detected the lie. He did not feel at his ease with her. Had she accused him openly he would have blustered and asserted his right to act as it pleased him; since she chose to ignore the matter, he felt himself at a disadvantage. She was placing him deliberately in the wrong. This incensed him. Why, he asked himself with an oath, should she adopt this self-righteous pose and snub him by her silence? He was not going to tolerate that sort of thing. He would put his foot down, put it down pretty effectively, and make her realise that he was master in his own home.

That was the attitude he assumed when absent from her; when confronted with her gentle, dignified presence he was considerably less bold. He shuffled and dissembled, and endeavoured by fitful bursts of kindness, too forced to be convincing, to sustain the fiction of his unalterable affection.

Pamela was a woman who believed in the power of silence. To upbraid a man, however deserving he were of reproof, was wasted effort; it gave him an excuse for anger,—an angry person being unreasonable, nothing is gained by exciting his ire. Nevertheless, her distrust once aroused, she became watchful and suspicious. What she observed during the next few weeks decided her that Blanche must go. She could no longer doubt that between her husband and the governess existed a secret understanding prejudicial to the happiness of all concerned.

The thing was an amazing revelation to Pamela. Though she had realised for a long while that Herbert's love for her was no longer of the ardent quality that at one time, when separation had seemed imminent, had made their parting impossible, she had not supposed, despite the warning in his wife's letter, despite her own bitter experience in watching the waning of his love, that he was a man of loose principles who pursued women idly for the gratification of a sensual nature. The discovery was a shock to her. She felt wounded and humiliated. It was an added degradation for her to reflect that the man she had loved so well, who had ruined her life, for whose sake she was living, according to the world's judgment, in sin, was not the fine character she had believed him to be,—was merely a selfish profligate, hunting women for his pleasure, and carelessly breaking their lives. At least she would save Blanche from him, if that were possible. It was no easy task for Pamela to undertake. She lacked the power of the wife's authority; and she realised perfectly that it was the lack of this power which made Arnott so brutally indifferent to her disapproval.

When she lodged her complaint he flew into a rage. It was at night when, Blanche having retired, they were alone together in the drawing-room. Arnott had been out of the room when Blanche left it; he was frequently absent from

the room about that hour; Pamela knew quite well that he was in the habit of waylaying the girl on the stairs. When he entered, carrying the glass of whisky which was the ostensible reason for his absence, she met him with the announcement that she intended to part with Blanche and revert to the system of a coloured nurse for the children.

"What for?" he demanded, and reddened awkwardly.

Pamela regarded him steadily.

"I do not think it wise to have her in the house," she answered. "You don't need to ask my reason. You are quite aware why I consider her an unfit companion for my children."

"Look here!" he said. He placed the glass he carried on a table, and approached the sofa on which she was seated, and stood leaning against the head of it, looking at her angrily. "You're fond of taking that tone lately. I don't like it. What the devil do you mean by your insinuations?"

"Need we discuss," she said, "what is so flagrant and abominable? You know what I mean. You have given me every occasion lately for distrusting you."

"I suppose you are jealous?" he said. "Good Lord!"

He tapped the floor irritably with his foot, and eyed her for a second or so in silence. Then he leaned suddenly towards her.

"Suppose I insist on her remaining?" he asked, his face on a level with hers. "Suppose I put my foot down? ... You've no right to object."

Pamela's expression froze as she stared bade into his angry eyes. Not at once did she grasp the magnitude of the insult he flung at her; as his meaning broke fully upon her, she whitened to the lips.

"Ah! dear heaven!" she cried, and drew bade as though he had struck her. "To think that you should say that to me,—that you should hold me so cheaply in your thoughts! How dare you?"

"Cheap!" he sneered. "Women are cheap—and ungrateful. I've given you everything you wanted; I've denied you nothing... I've been generous. It has been a fair exchange. If there are things you don't like, you've got to put up with them. You've got to stand this sort of thing." He worked himself into a rage. "You and your damned jealousy!" he shouted. "I've had enough of it. I can't be decently civil to a girl but you take it in the light of a personal slight. I won't hear any more of this tom-foolery. The girl stays. I won't be brow-beaten in this fashion."

"Very well," Pamela said. Despite her quiet manner, her voice broke; she was trembling from head to foot. "In that case, it is I who will go. If I had realised three years ago the position in which you held me, I would have left you then. Although to part then would have caused me pain, it would have left untarnished my faith in you. You've killed that."

He made a grab at her and caught her by the shoulder and shook her roughly.

"By heaven!" he cried. "You tempt me to strike you. So you would leave me, would you? What do you suppose will become of you and the children without my protection? ... You've lived with me for eight years,—you've had everything I could give you; and in a moment of beastly jealousy you talk as lightly of leaving me as though I were nothing to you. What are you going to do if you leave my protection?"

"I earned my own living before I met you," she answered.

"You hadn't the children then," he reminded her.

"No," Pamela admitted, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't you think they have a right to be considered?" he demanded. "You are not so damned selfish as to deny that, I imagine. If you leave my home, you ruin their future."

He was quick to see his advantage. He did not wish her to take the step she threatened. Social ostracism in two countries was rather much for a man, who has passed his youth, to face complacently. He had come to a time of life when the comforts of a home are indispensable; knocking about the world, even if accompanied by a mistress, did not appeal to his fastidiousness. Her threat had taken him by surprise; he had not considered this possibility; it found him unprepared. He pressed his point more insistently.

"You've got to consider them," he persisted. "If things leak out it will be beastly awkward for them when they are older. You've no right to make them suffer. You've no right to force poverty on them as well as disgrace. And it will be poverty. If you leave me, I will do nothing for you, nor for them."

At that she turned her face and regarded him fixedly.

"If I leave you," she said, "I wouldn't desire you to do anything for me,—but I can compel you to provide for the children."

He stared at her. He apprehended her meaning fully, and his face went a dull red.

"So you've sunk to that?" he said. "You'd show up well—wouldn't you?—as prosecutrix in a case of bigamy."

He moved away, and stood with his back to her, trying to master his anger, trying to resist the devil in him which tempted him to murder her. At that moment he hated her as passionately as at one time he had loved her. It would

have given him immense satisfaction to have hurt her, to have seen her wince under his hands.

"Oh! you hold a trump card in that knowledge," he muttered. "It was clever of you to have thought of that."

Pamela made no response. She remained perfectly motionless, looking miserably away from him, staring unseeingly straight before her. Arnott glanced at her contemptuously, and flung out of the room.

Chapter Eighteen.

Pamela rose the next morning with a dumb anger in her heart. She had passed a sleepless night,—a night of anguish, such as she had not experienced since the time following her discovery of the existence of Arnott's wife. She did not know how to act. She needed advice sorely, and knew of no one to whom she could turn in her trouble. The delicacy of her position made it impossible for her to seek outside help. Whatever difficulty arose through her relations with Arnott, she must face it alone.

On one thing she was resolved; the night's reflection had confirmed her on this point; Blanche must go at once. Arnott's insistence that the girl should remain weighed with her very lightly, and failed to shake her determination.

She went downstairs with her decision arrived at, with no intention of discussing the matter again. There was no one to discuss it with she found on descending; Arnott had breakfasted and left the house, taking a small amount of luggage with him. This, she realised, was his way of evading unpleasantness. Possibly the recognition that he dared not further assert his authority, coupled with a dislike for admitting defeat had moved him to this course as the only dignified way out of a dilemma. He left her to act on her own responsibility.

Pamela breakfasted alone. For the first time since their marriage she experienced a relief in his absence. She lingered over the meal, encouraging a sense of independence which this solitariness gave her. Had she known that he had gone away for ever it would not have troubled her at the moment. She did not wish him back. Realising this with a faint touch of surprise, she set herself to analyse her feelings in regard to him. It caused her something of a shock to discover from this analysis that in three years her love for him had shrunk to inconsiderable dimensions. She was conscious of a feeling of contempt for him which came dangerously near to repulsion. The scene of the previous night had killed her respect for him finally. Further, it had convinced her that he had ceased entirely to care for her. This man of uncontrolled passions had wearied of her, as doubtless he had wearied of his first wife. Possibly, if she had left him three years ago before his passion had begun to wane, his love would have endured longer. With men of Arnott's temperament the inaccessible is always the most desired.

When she had finished breakfast she went upstairs to the nursery for her difficult interview with the governess. She had expected Miss Maitland to come down with the children. It was past the hour for their morning walk. To her amazement, when she entered the nursery, Maggie was in sole charge, endeavouring with the willing incapacity of her type to get the children into their walking things. Pamela was helping her by amusing the boy while she fitted his cap over the unruly curls. At sight of his mother the boy fought vigorously to go to her, while Pamela darted gleefully forward with the news that there was no Miss Maitland anywhere; she had looked in the bed and under the bed, and Maggie had hunted too. But Miss Maitland had gone, and her clothes had gone. Some one had come quite early and carried her trunk away.

"Perhaps," Pamela ended cheerfully, "some one came and fetched her away in the night."

Her mother turned white while she listened to the child's excited explanation. She took the boy from Maggie, and while she proceeded with his dressing, asked in a low voice what the girl knew about the matter. Maggie's information was not more lucid than the child's. No one, it appeared, had seen Miss Maitland leave; but a strange boy had come for her luggage at seven, and John had carried it downstairs. The strange boy had left a note for the missis. Pamela asked for the note. Maggie had not seen it, but she believed it had been left in the hall.

Pamela finished dressing the children, and led little David downstairs. She told Maggie to take them in the garden and let them play in the shade; she would come out later and join them. Then she turned back, white and trembling, an ugly doubt haunting her mind, and searched for the note that had been left for her. Would the note, she wondered, explain this horrible mystery, or merely increase her doubt? It was lying where the boy had left it on the hall table, and it was addressed, she saw, in Blanche's handwriting. She opened it and read it where she stood. The writer had omitted the formality of the customary mode of address, she had also omitted to sign her name at the end.

"When you read this," she had written, "you will probably have heard of my departure, and you will feel less surprise at the abrupt manner of my leaving when I say that I was an unwilling listener to what passed between you and Mr Arnott after I left the drawing-room last night. For the sake of my reputation I could not remain beneath your roof an hour longer than was necessary. I made my preparations last night and left early this morning. I warn you, by the knowledge I possess, to be careful how you discuss me and my actions. If my reputation suffers I shall know where to attach the blame."

Pamela folded the note carefully, and carried it with her into the sitting-room, and sat down to think. This girl held the dangerous knowledge of her false position as Arnott's wife. She meant to make use of the knowledge if at any time it suited her to use it. The thought was bitterly humiliating. For the time it swamped every other consideration, even the doubt which had haunted her before reading the note was lost sight of in the shock of this discovery.

She tried to recall what had been said on the previous evening that had revealed their secret to this girl, who from her own admission had been eavesdropping. But of that interview no clear recollection remained. She could not recall the scraps of actual talk; only the bitterness of that monstrous duologue lingered in her memory, and the insults

Herbert had flung at her in his anger, and her own threat to leave him. Reviewing the scene now, the sordidness of it gripped her, disgusted her. And to think that a third person should have deliberately listened to that painful, miserable interview. The thought of Blanche's duplicity enraged her; the veiled threat conveyed in the note angered her more than it alarmed her. How dared she threaten her with the disclosure of her infamously acquired knowledge?

She read the note carefully a second time. There was no suggestion in it that the writer's flight were in any sense connected with Arnott's sudden departure. And yet that veiled threat at the end...

Pamela pondered over this doubt for a long while; and the longer she considered it the greater the doubt grew. It occurred to her that Blanche had had some motive in penning those offensive words. Could it be possible that after his angry exit last night Herbert had gone to this girl and arranged with her the manner of her leaving? Pamela wished she knew. Better the ugly truth than the horror of this uncertainty. At least she would know how to act if she knew the worst. Possibly he would write, she reflected. He could scarcely behave so outrageously as to leave home in this secret fashion and tender no explanation of his whereabouts, or his purpose in leaving. There was nothing for it but to wait and see what the days brought forth. But this waiting in utter ignorance was galling. It forced home to her to the full the degradation of her false position. Had it not been for the children she would have quitted his home finally. But, as Arnott had reminded her, the children were her first consideration; she had forfeited the right to consider herself.

She allowed an hour to slip by in these unprofitable and bitter reflections before she recollected her promise to the children, and rising, went out into the garden to join them. It caused her a shock of dismay to discover Mrs Carruthers sitting under the trees with them—a puzzled, perturbed Mrs Carruthers, fully informed by Pamela, the younger, of the governess' mysterious disappearance. She looked up when Pamela came towards them, rose, and advanced to meet her.

"My dear," she said, "you look worried. Whatever is this I've been hearing from Pamela? She tells me Blanche has gone."

It was impossible, Pamela realised, to keep Mrs Carruthers in ignorance of obvious domestic events; but she would have preferred to delay talking over these disturbing matters until she was better prepared. It had not occurred to her, until confronted with the actual difficulty, that she would be called upon to discuss with any interested inquirer the mysterious details of the absconding of her children's governess, which, in conjunction with Arnott's unexpected departure on the same day, might very easily give rise to gossip. Arnott's interest in the governess had aroused attention at Muizenberg, as Pamela was perfectly aware. She could only hope to avert scandal in regard to this event by the caution with which she explained it. So far as Mrs Carruthers was concerned she felt that she could rely upon her absolute discretion; she was the one woman she knew in whom she could have confided, had it been possible to confide in any one. But the nature of her trouble sealed her lips; it was too sordid and shameful a story to impart to other ears.

"Yes; she has gone," she answered.

"But why?" demanded Mrs Carruthers, who felt, through having recommended Blanche, in a sense responsible for the girl.

"She ran away," piped Pamela junior's shrill treble.

"Go and play," said Pamela. "Mummy wants to talk business."

"But you said you'd come and play too," the child protested.

"So I will presently. Run away now, like a good girlie."

Mrs Carruthers drew a hand through Pamela's arm and strolled with her along the path.

"I don't understand," she said. "Why should Blanche leave you in this manner? It's such a mad thing to do. What can the girl have been thinking of? It ruins her prospects. One couldn't recommend her after such extraordinary behaviour. Maggie tells me she went before any one was up. But why, Pamela? She must have had a reason."

"I suppose she had," Pamela agreed. "The only thing I can think of is that she knew I was going to dismiss her and simply forestalled me."

Mrs Carruthers looked perplexed.

"I thought you were entirely satisfied with her," she remarked.

"No," Pamela returned. "In many respects she was admirable. But I never cared much for her; and as you know I found her system in the nursery very trying. She had too much authority. I meant to try a nurse again."

"Well, I am astonished," Mrs Carruthers exclaimed. "I believed she was a perfect treasure. But the fact of your intention to dismiss her is no warrant for her extraordinary behaviour. To run away like that! My dear Pamela, it's absurd. What does Mr Arnott think about it?"

At this sudden and wholly unforeseen question Pamela's composure forsook her. She flushed red, and then went so very pale that Mrs Carruthers, watching her, could not fail to detect her agitation. She did not know what to make of these signs of distress. Had Pamela been guilty of making away with the governess she could not have appeared more conscience-stricken. Her eyes refused to meet Mrs Carruthers' steady gaze: they shifted uneasily and sought the gravel of the path.

"I don't know," she stammered.

The answer, as much as her manner of uttering it, sounded disingenuous even in her own ears. She made an effort to collect her scattered wits, conscious that she was conveying a suggestion to her friend's mind of the very suspicions she was anxious to avert.

"Herbert had left before we knew about Blanche," she explained with nervous haste. "He went away this morning immediately after breakfast. You see," she looked at Mrs Carruthers quickly, with wide apprehensive eyes which appealed mutely for sympathy, "that makes it so much more difficult for me,—his not being here to advise me. Oh! Connie, I am so bothered. I don't know how to act."

"That's awkward," said Mrs Carruthers, feeling too bewildered to detect that the remark was scarcely tactful.

She thought for a moment.

"I'll ask Dickie when he gets home this evening what he thinks you ought to do. He'll come in and have a chat with you, if you like. After all, it isn't your business to bother about the girl if she chooses to serve you such a trick. I should put her out of my mind, if I were in your place. I am disappointed in that girl."

Suddenly tears rose in Pamela's eyes. She tried hard to blink them away unseen; but they welled bigger and bigger until they overflowed and rolled down her white cheeks. Mrs Carruthers slipped an arm about her waist.

"You poor dear!" she said.

"It's stupid of me," murmured Pamela apologetically. "But I'm so worried. I feel all unstrung. It seems so odd for Blanche to have gone away like that. It's so difficult to explain."

"I shouldn't attempt explanations," Mrs Carruthers advised. "When do you expect Mr Arnott home?" she asked.

Again the distressing change of colour showed in Pamela's face, and again her embarrassed, reluctant admission that she did not know when to expect him puzzled her listener anew. The whole business was incomprehensible.

Mrs Carruthers' knowledge of the Arnott's affairs was greater than Pamela realised. Being fairly astute, her perception had led her to detect more of the breach than was obvious to the ordinary observer. Had she not already suspected it, Pamela's manner would have convinced her that the governess' flight was not alone responsible for her present distress. A more personal trouble could alone account for the unhinged state of her mind. To avoid adding to her embarrassment, she left the subject with the reflection that dwelling on annoyances merely aggravated them, and proposed joining the children.

But Pamela's face haunted her for the rest of the day. Despite a strong disinclination to allow the suspicion, the belief that Arnott's absence and the girl's flight were in some way connected, and not merely coincident, as his wife had so lamely endeavoured to convey, was difficult to banish. Pamela's very anxiety to disprove the connection suggested to the unbiassed mind that the connection was there. Mrs Carruthers did not like Arnott. She threw that fact into the balance of her judgment, and resolved to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Chapter Nineteen.

Desire to be perfectly fair in her judgment of Arnott did not prevent Mrs Carruthers from imparting her views to her husband, when discussing with him that evening the mysterious happenings next door. She first acquainted him with the bare details, and asked for his opinion; since he had no opinion to offer she proceeded to unfold hers. Carruthers was astounded; he was also, to his wife's amazement, annoyed with her.

"Perhaps you won't be so ready to recommend people in future," he remarked. "This is what comes of interfering in other people's concerns."

"Don't be so unreasonable," she expostulated. "The girl appeared to be all right. She was with the Smiths for years."

"Smith's dead, you see," he answered.

Mrs Carruthers stared.

"You think she was that sort of girl?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know," he returned, and looked a trifle sheepish. "But Arnott got her talked about pretty badly at Muizenberg. A fellow who was there at the same time told me it was scandalous the way he went on."

Mrs Carruthers regarded her husband for a second or two in meditative silence. There was something in her suspicion after all; it was not merely prejudice which had been responsible for connecting Arnott's absence with the girl's flight in her mind.

"Dickie," she said, "I believe they have gone away together."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"I believe she knows it," Mrs Carruthers pursued. She recalled Pamela's stricken face, the evasive, frightened look in her eyes, her halting admission of ignorance as to her husband's movements. "The brute!" she murmured, and added abruptly, "What a horrible thing to have happened. How is it going to end?"

"The usual way, I imagine," Carruthers replied. "Unless of course she decides to keep quiet for the sake of the kids."

A pause followed. Carruthers bit the end off a cigar and lighted it irritably. He was wishing that the Arnott's affairs would not intrude themselves on his domestic peace. From his knowledge of his wife he realised that, however disinclined, he would be dragged into the business somehow. He anticipated her proposal that he should act as adviser to the deserted wife. In general he was not abnormally selfish; but he disliked being mixed up in other people's scandals; and he did not see how he could keep out of this very well. He smoked energetically, and maintained a non-committal silence. In the meanwhile Mrs Carruthers rapidly reviewed the situation.

"But the girl..." she said suddenly, and broke off with a thoughtful puckering of her brows. "And I wanted George Dare to marry that girl," she added, ending the pause.

"It's a let off for him anyway," remarked Carruthers.

"I would never have believed her capable of such wickedness," she observed presently.

"I don't see why you should believe it of her now," he ventured. "After all, you know nothing. There may be quite a different explanation of Arnott's absence. Didn't his wife say where he had gone?"

"I didn't like to ask her. She seemed to be in entire ignorance as to his movements. And she was so upset. It was her manner that made me suspicious. She was dazed, and—oh! hopeless. No one would take the disappearance of a governess to heart like that. I told her you would run in for a chat and advise her what to do."

He groaned.

"Why couldn't you leave me out of it?" he protested. "I can't advise her. I've no experience in these things. You can tell her from me not to bother her head about the matter. I'll make inquiries to-morrow, and find out what I can. I don't suppose it will lead to much. The girl is old enough to look after herself, and Arnott's movements are no concern of mine."

"Well, really! Dickie, you might be more helpful," she said.

"That is being helpful," he insisted. "It's a much more reasonable idea than yours, and more discreet in the circumstances. If things are anything like so bad as you are trying to make out, the less I run in there the better."

Mrs Carruthers laughed.

"You nice chivalrous person!" she scoffed. "A fine friend you make for a woman in distress."

"Distressed women aren't my forte," he said. "You should enlist the sympathies of an unmarried man. These bachelors in their sublime ignorance are bolder."

"I would enlist the help of George Dare," she said, "if it wasn't for the unfortunate circumstance of his being—"

She broke off abruptly. To finish the sentence would have been to abuse Dare's confidence, and she had no wish to do that.

"Of his being what?" Carruthers inquired, looking up.

"So far away," she finished lamely. "You see, you are on the spot."

"Yes," he admitted. "I wish I wasn't. As though a man's own domestic troubles aren't sufficient without his being expected to shoulder another man's neglected responsibilities. There are people whose business it is to undertake these cases. If Mrs Arnott wants advice she knows where to procure it."

"Oh! a woman never goes to a lawyer until she has exhausted every other resource," Mrs Carruthers interposed.

"You are letting your imagination run away with your commonsense," Carruthers resumed. "It is more than possible that you have discovered the proverbial mare's nest. Because Arnott leaves home a few hours after the governess has done a bunk is no reason for concluding that they have eloped together. The explanation is probably much more simple."

"Then I wish you would explain it," she said with mild exasperation.

"Very likely they had a row," he returned; "and Arnott cleared out. It's the male equivalent for feminine hysteria. A jealous woman can make things fairly uncomfortable."

"He shouldn't give her cause for jealousy."

"Well, there of course," replied Carruthers, amused, "your argument is unassailable. But these things will happen. Man was born to be a hunter, you know; and throughout the ages woman has remained his favourite quarry. It's pure instinct with us; and occasionally, as in Arnott's case, instinct and opportunity occur simultaneously. In employing a good-looking underling, a married woman courts disaster."

"Dickie," exclaimed his disgusted wife, "how dare you talk like that? I am ashamed of you."

He laughed good-humouredly, and rose from his seat.

"And now," he said, "since you really wish it, I'll go in and comfort Pamela. I'm in the mood for it."

She gave him a bright look, in which a smiling sarcasm strove with her satisfaction in having gained this concession.

"You have just time before dinner, my fine hunter," she observed. "If Pamela is in the humour, bring her back with you."

Pamela was in no mood to accept an invitation to dine out. She was indeed so distraught in manner and so extraordinarily depressed that Carruthers did not propose it. He did not know what to make of her; but he was of his wife's opinion that the unceremonious departure of the governess was not a sufficient cause for her obvious distress. Rather than adopt her theory, however, he clung to his belief that the Arnotts had had a domestic difference of more than ordinary seriousness, and that Arnott's sudden absence was the result. The contemporaneous disappearance of the governess was an awkward development. Had he known where to address the man, he would have wired to him and suggested the propriety of his immediate return. But having in mind what his wife had confided to him, and baffled by Pamela's extraordinary reticence, it was not in Carruthers to bring himself to the point of asking outright for the address. When he hinted at the advisability of summoning Arnott home, Pamela ignored the suggestion. He inclined to the view that she actually did not know where he was.

Very much perplexed, Carruthers returned home. He had relieved Pamela of further responsibility in regard to Blanche Maitland, by promising to look up the girl's friends and discover, if he could, what had become of her. That was as much as he could do, he informed his wife; and reluctantly confessed, when she dragged the admission from him, that Pamela had not appeared anxious for him to undertake the task. The interview had been most unsatisfactory.

"That bears out my suspicion," Mrs Carruthers declared. "They have gone off together, and Pamela knows it."

"Well, in that case," Carruthers remarked, as he went in to dinner, "we shall all of us know it quite soon enough."

Carruthers' subsequent inquiries concerning Blanche Maitland elicited very little information. Her friends, if they knew anything definite, were evidently pledged to secrecy. They were aware that she had left her late employment, but her present whereabouts were unknown to them; they understood she was travelling.

That seemed to strengthen his wife's suspicion, Carruthers decided; but reflecting that it was no business of his, he dismissed the matter from his thoughts, having first informed Pamela that the girl's friends appeared satisfied as to her well-being, and that therefore there was no need for her to concern herself further about her. Pamela took the news very quietly. She thanked him for the trouble he had been to on her behalf; and it seemed to him that by her manner of thanking him she intimated that there was nothing further he could do. If, as Mrs Carruthers insisted, she knew the two had eloped, it was plain she did not intend to move in the matter for the present. He admired her reserve. Whatever the trouble between herself and her husband might be it was manifest she had no wish to discuss it. Her attitude he considered was highly correct and discreet.

Pamela passed an anxious week waiting for news of Arnott, but no letter arrived from him. A fortnight passed, a month, without bringing any news. This neglect confirmed her worst fears. She began seriously to consider her position. If Herbert had deserted her she could not continue living as she was doing in his house. It was monstrous to allow herself to be kept in this manner by a man who no longer wanted her.

But the difficulty was how to act. To seek outside advice, it would be necessary to disclose the shameful secret of her marriage. That, she realised, with its consequent disgrace and imprisonment for Herbert, would seem to him a paltry act of revenge on her part. She experienced as great a shrinking from punishing him, as from the thought of publishing her own shame, and bringing ostracism on her children.

The expedient of writing to Dare and making the demand on his friendship which he had asked her so urgently to make, crossed her mind more than once. She could consult him without fear that he would reveal her secret to others. His insistent request that she should appeal to him if in any difficulty, seemed almost as though he had foreseen this trouble looming ahead for her. Could it be that he knew something of Arnott's past? Impossible! No one, save themselves and Lucy Arnott, knew of his bigamous second marriage.

She sat down to write to Dare one day at Arnott's desk in the room he called his study. Save that he kept it for his exclusive use and wrote his letters there, it had no pretence at being a study; no one, least of all Arnott, ever studied there. Pamela opened the desk and searched for writing materials. Then she began a letter to Dare.

"You told me once," she reminded him, "that if ever I was in need of help such as a friend only could render, I was to write to you. My friend, I am in need of help now. I am in great trouble..."

Here she broke off, dissatisfied with this attempt, and tore the paper into minute fragments and threw them into the waste-paper basket. Then she started again. She got a little further with the second letter before this too occurred to her as unsatisfactory and followed the fate of the former attempt. In all she wrote six letters, none of which pleased her, and were each in turn consigned to the basket. Then, having exhausted the note-paper, she paused and sat back in the chair and thought. Was it wise after all to write to him? What could he, or any one, do to help her in her present distress? It was a matter which could only be settled between herself and Herbert, unless she was prepared to face the ordeal of a public scandal.

But the memory of Dare's face as he had pleaded with her in the garden, the sympathy of the strong kindly voice, the earnest insistence of his manner when he spoke of his desire to be helpful, and his right as her sincere friend to the privilege of her confidence, awoke in her a craving for his help, for the comfort of his advice. She was conscious also of a wish for his presence; it would be an immense relief merely to talk with him.

Quickly she resolved to make a further attempt to write to him, and searched in the desk for another sheet of paper. She opened the drawers, and turned over their contents,—bills principally, and old letters of Arnott's. From among a

pile of loose papers a cablegram fell out, face upward, with a cutting from a newspaper pinned to the back of it. The writing caught Pamela's eye; the brief message on the little yellow form was fully exposed. "Lucy Arnott died this morning." And the cablegram was dated ten months ago.

Pamela took it up and stared at the message with dull, comprehending eyes. Ten months earlier Arnott had received this news of his wife's death, and he had withheld the knowledge from her. Ten months ago he had it in his power to legalise their union, and he had not done it. He had wilfully deceived her in the matter of his wife's death. There was only one interpretation to put upon his conduct: he had no wish, no intention, to right the wrong he had done her.

Pamela shivered, and laid the cablegram down on the desk and stared at it, faint and sick with the pain and anger, the shamed resentment with which this knowledge filled her. Arnott's infamous conduct showed her plainly how lightly he regarded her, how little of honour, of love or respect he felt for the girl he had cheated into marrying him, and had made the mother of his children. Free now to marry her, he was satisfied to keep her in the shameful position of a mistress, and to follow lightly after illicit loves.

She recalled his words uttered on the last evening before he left home: "Cheap! Women are cheap." That probably had been his attitude always in regard to women.

She turned back the cablegram and looked at the printed form attached to it. It was a cutting from an English newspaper containing a brief notice of Lucy Arnott's death. Why, she wondered, had he kept the thing lying about loose in his drawer where any one might read it? She took it up, closed the desk, forgetting Dare and her intention to write to him, forgetting everything in face of this horrible ugly proof of Herbert's treachery; and going up to her own room, she locked the cablegram away in the safe where she kept her jewels.

Chapter Twenty.

Oddly enough the first news of Blanche Maitland came to Mrs Carruthers through Dare.

He mentioned in a letter that he had been to a music-hall entertainment where to his amazement the sphinx-like young person, who was a paragon of all the virtues, was playing accompaniments for the members of a musical troupe, to which she apparently belonged.

"I understood she was fostering the Arnott babies," he wrote. "You don't keep me fully posted as to events, as you promised. I tried to get hold of her, but learnt that she had gone on to Pretoria. It is an odd life for a girl, but more amusing, possibly, than tending the future generation."

Further on in the letter he said:

"I ran across Arnott in town—another surprise. He was very surly, and seemed to wish to avoid me, so I reconsidered my hospitable intention to ask him to lunch with me. How is She? If you don't mention Her in your next letter I shall run down and pursue my own inquiries."

Mrs Carruthers was highly perplexed. Why, she wondered, if Blanche had gone away with Arnott should she have joined a troupe of strolling singers? And if she had not gone away with Arnott, why was he in Johannesburg at the same time?

Carruthers could not explain this also as a coincidence. He did not attempt to. He remarked that it looked fishy, and asked his wife if she intended to inform Pamela. Mrs Carruthers was undecided.

"I don't know what to do," she confessed. "I think I'll write to George, and tell him to find out what he can about them. It will be necessary to explain certain things to him; I am sorry to be obliged to do that."

"Why?" inquired Carruthers.

She looked at him for a moment uncertainly. Dickie was a well-meaning person, but he was not astute. She possessed a beautiful contempt for his perspicacity.

"George admires Pamela," she said.

Carruthers received this intelligence unmoved.

"He would be a little unusual if he didn't," he returned. "I don't see why that fact should make you hesitate to enlist his services; it's much more likely to make him of use. Dare is cut out for the rôle of knight to distressed beauty; it suits his proportions; a stout man looks absurd in the cast."

Mrs Carruthers showed impatience.

"If you can't help, don't make fatuous remarks," she said. "George takes it too seriously. We don't want to complicate the present muddle. If I felt that he might make a fool of himself over this business I would sooner bite out my tongue than inform him."

"Then we aren't any forrader," Carruthers returned imperturbably, "except that we have a clue to Arnott's whereabouts, which in my opinion you have no right to keep from his wife."

"We don't know positively that she isn't fully informed," she replied.

Mrs Carruthers was worried, and felt consequently irritated. Dare's letter had reopened a subject which had been

slipping comfortably into the background of her thoughts. She was sorry for Pamela, whom she would willingly have helped had it lain in her power; but Pamela made no offer to confide in her. She never referred to Arnott's absence,— never spoke of him now. Mrs Carruthers formed the opinion that she still had no knowledge of his movements, that she did not know when to expect him back. An unpleasant sense of mystery hung over the affair, which imposed a painful constraint on their friendly relations. Pamela avoided intercourse with her neighbours, and was seldom to be seen without the children; it was as though she used them as a shield to guard against awkward encounters. But that she was unhappy was very obvious. She had become transformed into a thoughtful, care-worn woman, in whose eyes there lurked always a haunting expression of dread. It was this expression which, in spite of Pamela's aloofness, kept Mrs Carruthers' sympathies alight, and moved her, against her very earnest desire to keep George Dare from mixing himself up in Pamela's affairs, to write to him, and request him to discover if he could what Arnott was doing in Johannesburg.

Her letter brought Dare to Wynberg. He descended upon her in his usual informal manner, announcing his intended visit by telegram, and following the announcement as speedily as circumstances permitted. This course was a practice with him of many years' standing, and never before the present occasion had Mrs Carruthers resented it. The receipt of the telegram annoyed her. She had asked him to find out certain things about Arnott, and in response he had come away from the centre where he could have instigated inquiries which might have elicited useful information, led by some wild, unaccountable impulse which he ought, she felt, to have resisted. That he would come down had been the last thought in her mind.

Dare received a frigid welcome. He was in a way prepared for this. The letter she had written had been so vague and guarded in its wording that he had read between the lines her desire to keep him in the dark as far as possible as to the reason for the inquiries she wished him to make. Dare had no intention of being kept in the dark in any matter relating to Pamela. He intended to find out things for himself.

"You don't appear overjoyed to see me," he observed to his unwelcoming hostess, whose greeting of him lacked the warmth and kindness he was accustomed to from her.

"I am not," she answered severely. "Whatever did you come for?"

"To see Pamela," he replied unhesitatingly.

"Why?"

"Because from your mysterious communication I judged she was in some difficulty. You gave me a few insufficient facts. I want details. If you won't give them to me, she will."

Mrs Carruthers deliberated.

"I asked you to find out what Arnott was doing in Johannesburg," she said presently. "I fail to see what there was in that request to bring you to Wynberg."

"Arnott is not in Johannesburg any longer. He was leaving on the day I met him," he returned. "Why should you concern yourself about his movements? Presumably your request was not based on anxiety on his account; therefore I concluded your concern must be for Mrs Arnott. I came down to find out."

"I hope you are not going to give me cause to regret having written that letter," she said seriously.

"I hope not," he responded with equal gravity. "Why should you imagine anything of the sort? As I told you before, I only wish to be helpful to her."

She turned the subject, and talked to him on other matters; but Dare, after a brief interval, brought the conversation back to the topic which most interested him. He got very little satisfaction from Mrs Carruthers. Carruthers was more communicative. From him Dare heard the whole story, embellished with details which Mrs Carruthers had not heard. Arnott was pretty freely discussed at the club, of which he and Carruthers were members. Carruthers had come round to believe in his wife's theory that Arnott had eloped with the governess. The fact that she was touring with a musical troupe, was in his opinion merely a blind. When he tired of the girl, doubtless he would chuck it and come home.

"Well," said Dare, "I'm glad you told me. But I don't believe a word of it. He wasn't with the girl in Johannesburg, save in the sense of being in the same town. I'm going to clear up this business for my own satisfaction. To-morrow I shall call on Mrs Arnott."

"I supposed that was your object," Carruthers answered. "But you won't get much out of her. It's my belief she is as ignorant as the rest of us. She's feeling this, Dare. It makes me feel sloppily sentimental merely to look at her. The chap wants kicking. You be careful what you are doing, my boy. I am rather of Connie's opinion that you'd be wiser to keep out of this. It's the devil of a business to attempt comforting a pretty married woman. Stick to widows and spinsters, I say. What!"

"You're an awful old ass, Dickie," was all Dare said in response.

Dare experienced a curious exasperation in the knowledge that the Carruthers both doubted the disinterestedness of his purpose in seeking to be of use to Pamela. A man may befriend the woman he loves without any base thought in connection with her. In coming to Wynberg to see Pamela, Dare had no other intention than to be of service to her. The doubtful possibility of being able to serve a woman whose husband has presumably deserted her, did not strike him. Once in possession of the facts he would be in a position at least to advise her; might, if things were not as Carruthers represented them, assist in putting a stop to the scandal that was afloat. It was abominable to reflect that

Pamela's name was being bandied about at the clubs.

Pamela was in the garden when Dare called in the morning. The boy was asleep on a kaross spread under the trees, and she was seated in a chair near him, sewing, when Dare opened the gate and entered. The sound of his footsteps on the hard gravel caused her to look up; and an expression of quick alarm showed in her face as her eyes met his.

He advanced swiftly towards her; and, as he crossed the lawn, she rose and stood, flushed, embarrassed, painfully self-conscious, looking at him in a dismayed silence which she seemed unable to break. Dare spoke first.

"I've sprung a surprise on you," he said, and took her proffered hand and held it firmly gripped in his. "I'm staying next door."

"I didn't know you were expected," Pamela returned, recovering herself with an effort, and giving him a welcoming smile. "I haven't seen Connie for days."

"It was a surprise for her too," he admitted. "I came self-invited. Are you busy? I should like to stay for a chat, if I may."

"That's my only business at present," she said, and pointed towards the sleeping child. "I'm on guard."

Dare looked down at the child.

"The little chap grows," he remarked. "He was only a baby when last I saw him. How's the girlie?"

"Oh! very well. If you stay you will see her later. She is out at present. Sit down, won't you?"

He drew a chair forward facing hers on the side farthest away from the child, and sat down. It recalled, save for the boy's unconscious presence, the afternoon when he had last sat there with her, and had wrung from her the promise which she had failed to keep.

"It is like old times, this," he observed, and scrutinised her thoughtfully as he sat back in his seat. Despite the flush in her cheeks which the sight of him had brought there, he could not fail to detect traces of the trouble which had wrought such a marked change in her appearance that, had he needed assurance there was something in what Carruthers had told him, her face would have supplied the necessary proof. "I'm awfully glad to see you again. I came with that object," he said.

"To see me!" Pamela looked puzzled.

"To see you," he repeated. "Do you remember something I asked you to do in this garden, the last time we sat here?"

Pamela did not immediately answer. That she followed his question he realised by the deepening of the flush in her cheeks. She lay back in her chair, very still and quiet, the long lashes drooping above her eyes, veiling the trouble in their depths. Dare sat forward now, regarding her steadily.

"What was that?" she asked presently; and he knew that she put the question merely to gain time. She understood perfectly to what he referred.

"You promised me that if ever you were in a position in which a friend might prove helpful, you would extend to me a friend's privilege," he said earnestly. "Have you kept that promise?"

"I have not been in that position," Pamela replied without looking at him.

Dare laid a hand on her dress.

"Pamela," he said quietly, "I think I deserve that you should be honest with me."

She turned very white. How he had learnt of the trouble which she believed was known only to herself, she had no means of judging, but that he was in possession of certain information his manner assured her. She wondered how he had come by his knowledge,—how much he knew. Suddenly she experienced again the longing to confide in him, the intense desire for his sympathy and counsel which had moved her to the point of writing to him on the day when she had discovered the further proof of Arnott's treachery. Since that day until now she had not thought of appealing to him.

"I did write," she confessed in a low voice, "over a month ago; but I tore the letter up. Then something happened, and I felt I couldn't write."

He looked at her for a moment or so in silence. The flush had come back to her cheeks, and the blue of her eyes as they met his darkened almost, to black. The pathos, and the wistfulness of them wrung his heart.

"I'm glad you thought of writing," he said; "that was something towards it anyway. I want you to go a little further and confide in me fully."

"I've thought of doing that,—I've wanted to," she said. "But—"

She glanced at her sleeping child, and from him back into the strong, sympathetic face of this man who sought to serve her, whose help she so sorely needed.

"If I only knew what to do!" she cried.

"I'm telling you what to do," he answered. "It seems to me perfectly simple. Whatever the difficulty is it can't make it easier hugging it to yourself; and if it lies within the scope of human power to help you, you know I'll do anything for you." He leaned towards her suddenly and grasped her hand. "Pamela, don't you trust me?"

"Yes," she said, troubled and hesitating... "Yes. But I can't talk to you here."

"No," he said. "But later..."

"When Maggie comes for the child," she answered in a whisper, "we will go indoors... I—will trust you..."

Chapter Twenty One.

No matter how great a control a man exercises over himself in ordinary circumstances, brought face to face with the painfully unexpected it is frequently the self-contained man who loses the grip on his emotions, and with it his more extended outlook in favour of an immense concentration upon the personal factor created by the new development. The story which Pamela unfolded produced some such effect on Dare. The emotions which moved him while listening to the sordid, pitiful tale were varied. The story of Arnott's bigamous marriage enraged him. The personal factor crept into that. The man had not only cheated the girl, he had cheated him,—robbed him of the only woman he had ever wished to marry. He had stolen her from him, having no right to her. This thought filled him with a bitter sense of personal loss, of personal injury. The element of self threw his imagination out of focus for the time. He had a very strong feeling that he wanted to, that he had to, punish Arnott for that mean deception. He would have enjoyed coming to grips with the man.

Then he became acutely aware that Pamela was still talking, telling him other things of an equally painful nature. With an effort he brought his mind back to the subject.

This part of the story was more difficult to tell. Pamela told it in short fragmentary sentences. She concealed nothing. She spoke of her enlightenment, of the difficult choice offered her, and her inability to choose the right course, in low strained tones and with downcast eyes. She did not look at Dare while she spoke. He was standing in front of the window, with his back to the opening, watching her with grave intent face which betrayed little of what he was feeling as he listened to the difficult recital. He was endeavouring, despite the disappointment her confession caused him, to excuse, even to defend, her choice. As she urged, there had been the child to consider, and at that time she loved the man.

Then she spoke of the waning of Arnott's love, of his frequent unkindness, and her own increasing indifference. Again Dare was conscious of his personal interest in this part of the story. The self-confessed decrease in her love for the man who was not her husband, affected him directly. He felt glad that she had told him that.

She passed on to Arnott's infatuation for the girl, who was her children's governess, of their disappearance on the same day, and the inevitable conclusion which, against her own will, she had arrived at in connection with that circumstance, and the fact that he had not written, nor sent any explanation of his absence.

Then came the most difficult part of the whole narrative. Pamela had fetched the cablegram, which she had found in Arnott's desk and transferred to the safe, and this she placed in Dare's hand as the simplest way of explaining the duplicity she found impossible to put into words.

"You see," she said, "that cablegram is a year old. He received that ten months before he left home... And he never told me. I found it after he had gone. He did not intend to take advantage of that knowledge... He didn't care."

Tears, the first she had shed, came into her eyes. She wiped them away quietly.

"He doesn't care," she said, "what becomes of me and the children."

Dare, as he held in his hands the cablegram which assured him that the man who had tricked this woman to whom he was not lawfully married, was now free to fulfil his obligation, realised perfectly that of all people calculated to be of service to her in the present crisis he was the worst chosen. He was only conscious of a feeling of regret that the barrier had been removed. It swamped for the time the more chivalrous emotion of pity for Pamela in her helpless position. He stared at the cablegram for a long while without speaking. Then he said, still without looking at her—

"I am afraid there isn't any reason for doubting the correctness of your deduction in this instance. The evidence is damning." He lifted his eyes from the paper suddenly and fixed them upon her. "This matter wants thinking over carefully," he said. "I wasn't prepared for this. It's worse than anything I had anticipated."

The sight of her distressed face, of the slow tears raining over her cheeks, unnerved him, and at the same time called forth his better qualities. He forgot himself in the more worthy emotion of compassion for her in her affliction.

"I hadn't any idea that things were as bad as this," he said. "Thank God! you told me. I'll have to think out what's best to be done. I'm unprepared, you see... But we've got to straighten the muddle somehow."

He had in his mind a plan, which had presented itself when she confessed to the bogus nature of her marriage, whereby the muddle could be straightened in, what seemed to him in the circumstances, the simplest way; but in view of her present distress he hesitated to speak of that now. The knowledge of the death of Arnott's wife complicated things.

"Oh!" she cried, with soft vehemence. "The comfort of having some one to confide in,—some one I can trust! I've been eating my heart out these last two months. The Carruthers are very kind,—but I couldn't tell them what I have

told you. And Mr Carruthers wouldn't be able to advise me. He would wish me to consult a lawyer." She clasped her hands tightly in her lap. "I couldn't have all these intimate, disgraceful details publicly exposed."

"No," he said reassuringly; "of course not."

But he did not see how without publicity the matter could possibly be satisfactorily arranged. She might, he decided, have to agree to that later. But he refrained from troubling her at the present stage with any such alternative.

"It appears to me," he said slowly, "that the first thing to be done is to find Arnott. Until I have seen him it is impossible to come to any decision... Have I your permission to let him know that I am in full possession of the facts you have related?"

She looked a little frightened.

"Oh!" she said. "Must you tell him that? He will never forgive me."

"Do you think that matters?" He tapped the cablegram he still held. "In face of this, I don't think you have much to expect from him save what is gained through compulsion. We shall be forced to use our knowledge."

She gazed up at him, faintly perplexed.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked.

"What do you want me to do?"

Pamela hesitated. Any love which had remained from the wreckage of the past had died with the finding of the cablegram after Arnott's desertion. It seemed to her that all sense of feeling had died with it, except only the jealous maternal love, which gathered strength with the decline of the rest.

"I want only one thing from him," she answered presently, her eyes evading his without however falling... "I've a right to that—his name. Don't you think I am within my right in demanding that?"

"Yes," he agreed, "but—"

Pamela glanced at him swiftly.

"You think he won't consent?" she asked.

"I wasn't thinking that. I imagine if it came to the point, we could oblige him to consent. But are you quite sure that course would be wise? Wouldn't it, perhaps, entail fresh suffering on you?"

"I was not considering myself," she said. "It doesn't seem to matter much what becomes of me."

He approached her, and stood over her, all the love that was in his heart revealed in his earnest eyes. He had not intended to speak of his love then; the time occurred to him as ill chosen; but while she discussed in such calm, dispassionate tones the only solution which presented itself to her mind, it seemed to him, if he delayed showing her another way out of her present trouble, the opportunity might not offer itself again.

"Won't you," he said very quietly, "take my name instead?"

He seated himself on the sofa beside her, and possessed himself of her hands, which he held in both his. Pamela made no attempt to withdraw them. White and distressed and manifestly disconcerted, she averted her gaze from his and stared past him out at the sunshine. Her sole reason for hesitating to write to Dare had resulted from the conviction that his regard for her was deeper than that of a friend. Her feeling for him did not bear analysis either. He was a man whom from the first she had liked and respected; the respect remained unaltered, but the liking had increased insensibly until it assumed an importance in her thoughts which she found it best to discourage. Not for a moment did it strike her that he made this offer out of pity for her. She knew that he loved her,—that he wanted her. His proposal filled her less with surprise than concern. She was sorry to know that her own broken life might embitter his.

"Won't you," he repeated in the same quiet voice as before, "accept my name? I think you know that I love you. I have loved you for a great many years. I shouldn't speak of that now; only it seems to me such a tragic mistake you are making. The life you contemplate would be a wretched business. You will spoil the happiness of two lives—yours and mine—if you persist in it... I think I could make you happy, Pamela, if you would let me try."

Deliberately she faced round and met his gaze with sad blue eyes which seemed to have lost entirely their old happy expression.

"I know you could," she answered, her voice almost a whisper. "If it is any sort of satisfaction to you to hear it, I love you too. But I can't do what you ask. For the sake of my children I must marry their father. Don't you see the difference it makes to them?"

"I thought it might be that," he said. "But consider, Pamela,—they are so young. Don't you think they would be as happy and as safe under my guardianship?"

"That isn't the point to consider," she answered steadily. "When a woman has been circumstanced as I have been she realises the enormous difference these things make. I've felt the sting of it,—the dread of discovery,—the overwhelming sense of shame. I should be a selfish mother if I exposed my children to that. In whatever light you

stood to them, you could never make good the position which they have a right to as their father's children. Later, when they grow up, the world will make them feel that loss. If there were only myself to think of I wouldn't hesitate. But we take upon ourselves a great responsibility when we bring a life into the world... It's for the sake of the children... Oh! believe me, dear, it's only for their sakes I refuse."

The earnestness of her manner, the tears which dimmed her eyes and were with difficulty restrained, affected him deeply. He realised that the barrier which stood between them was insuperable as she saw it; but he was far from satisfied that she was right. Why in later years should the question of the children's parentage arise? He would take them away from Africa, and adopt them legally. He endeavoured to explain this to her. Pamela listened quietly; but he felt that he failed in convincing her.

"It is dear of you," she said, and pressed his hand. "But there is only one way in which I can hope to retrieve my mistake. I can't help thinking that it is best for your sake that I cannot do what you ask. The past clings to a woman. She never succeeds in burying it. I love you for loving me. I love you for wanting to marry me in spite of all you know. It is difficult for me to refuse; but it is better so."

"Oh! Pamela," he said; "you are just racking me. My happiness is bound up in you. I've nursed my love for you hopelessly for years, until everything else has become subordinated to it. It's part of myself. And now that you have it in your power to grant what I ask, you refuse. I want you, and you won't come to me."

"Don't make it harder for me," she pleaded. "It isn't easy to refuse. Can't you see, dear, I don't belong to myself any longer? I belong to the man who took my life and threw it aside when he had no further use for it. He has had the best of me,—my youth—my love." He winced. "Yes. I loved him once—passionately. I didn't believe it possible that I could ever love any one as I loved him. But I love you... not in the same way." She leaned towards him, and her eyes shone mistily, like sapphires gleaming in some translucent pool. "I was always a little afraid of him. Perfect love does not know fear. I wish I could marry you; but it isn't possible... I belong to him—the father of my children. I've got to live for the children now. Their claim on me counts above every other consideration."

He drew her nearer to him by the hands he still held clasped in his, and looked steadily into her face.

"And if he refuses?" he said hoarsely... "Pamela, if he refuses to agree to your demand?"

Pamela's eyes lingered on his for a while, the doubt which his question aroused calling up a dread of numberless possibilities.

"Oh!" she said, and paused dismayed. "He can't refuse," she added in strained sharpened tones.

She turned her head aside, and quite suddenly, without premonition, she was weeping in a furtive, frightened fashion that was immensely disconcerting to Dare. Her tears stabbed him. He got up and wandered away to the window and stood with his back to her in an attitude of deep dejection. A tormenting remorse gripped him.

"He can't refuse," he said reassuringly. "That will be all right. He can't on the face of things refuse..."

Chapter Twenty Two.

Dare lunched alone with Mrs Carruthers. He was a little unpunctual; but she waited for him, and they sat down as soon as he came in. She did not ply him with questions; she kept her curiosity within bounds until the meal was well advanced. He was strangely quiet and preoccupied. She did not know what to make of his dejected silence. Mysteries were worrying to Connie Carruthers' practical nature. It was the flavour of mystery which clung about the happenings next door that caused her, despite the warmth of her affection for Pamela, to avoid the house of late. She had the keen dislike of a healthy minded person for anything in the way of concealment. Discreet reticence was praiseworthy, but furtive silence bred distrust. His visit next door had, it seemed to her, given George Dare the air of a conspirator. Whatever shadow hung over the house had enveloped him in its gloom. It was absurd in her opinion for a man to allow his feeling for a married woman to swamp him in this fashion; it betrayed a lack of dignity and self-respect.

Dare did not wait for her to question him; he looked across at her towards the finish of the meal, and plunged of his own accord into the subject.

"That man, Arnott, is a double-dyed scoundrel," he said. "He has left that poor girl without a word. She doesn't know where he is even. He doesn't write to her."

"I suppose," Mrs Carruthers observed calmly, "if he has eloped with some one else he would be little likely to write to her. Why, in the name of commonsense, did she confide her troubles to you? You will become obsessed with the thought of the divorce court, and carry a ring in your waistcoat pocket in anticipation of the decree absolute. I wish I had eaten my pen before I wrote that letter to you."

She became aware of the offence in Dare's look, and was instantly contrite.

"George," she said, "I didn't mean to be an unfeeling beast. But you ought not to have come down. You ought not to mix yourself up in the Arnott's affairs. You can't do any good."

"Some one's got to see her through," he said. "You haven't done much in the way of helping."

"She doesn't confide in me," Mrs Carruthers retorted drily.

"Perhaps you haven't given her the opportunity," he returned. "I don't think you have shown a particularly friendly

spirit. Why don't you see more of her? She is moped to death."

"My dear boy," she replied, wholly unruffled, "it is bad form to push one's self forward where one is obviously not wanted. Forcing confidences is not in my line." She sipped her coffee, and regarded him with interest over the rim of the cup. "I have asked her in here repeatedly, but she invariably pleads the same excuse; she cannot leave the children. I am beginning to think with you that the possession of children is a qualified blessing."

Dare made an unexpected exclamation.

"Oh, damn the children!"

He was so entirely sincere that he omitted to apologise. She smiled faintly, and continued her scrutiny of him and the sipping of her coffee.

"Smoke," she said, "and give me a cigarette. It assists the reasoning faculties."

He got up, and went round the table to her with his open case in his hand. When he had lighted her cigarette he returned to his seat.

"I don't wish to appear inhospitable—" she began...

"I am leaving to-morrow," he interrupted her shortly.

She blew a cloud of smoke and followed it as it curled upward with her eyes. Then she looked again at Dare. He was leaning with his elbows on the tablecloth, his expression gloomily abstracted, his sombre eyes as they met hers conveying a mute resentment. Her attitude struck him as peculiarly unsympathetic.

"You must not go in there again," she said.

He stared in some surprise.

"I have no intention of doing so," he answered. "I didn't come down to fool about, but to gain information. I've learnt all I came to learn."

"And what use are you going to make of your information?" she asked.

She could not, despite the utmost caution, disguise her strong curiosity. That he would rest satisfied in the inactive rôle of sympathiser she did not for a moment believe. He would want to do things, want to concern himself actively in what was after all no business of his. These lean men generally had a reserve of energy which broke forth at awkward seasons, and manifested itself in disquieting ways.

He knocked the ash from his cigarette against the rim of a saucer, and refrained from looking at her as he replied.

"I don't know yet I suppose the immediate thing is to find Arnott, and discover what the fellow is really up to... I wish he were dead."

"That would certainly simplify matters," she said. "But people don't die merely to be obliging. You'll find him very much alive, I expect."

He nodded in gloomy acquiescence.

"And while you are ransacking the country for Arnott, what about your own affairs?" she inquired.

"Oh! that's all right. I'm entitled to leave." He emitted a short laugh. "I believe you regard me in the light of an irresponsible person."

"I've met wiser people," she allowed. "Quixotism is a form of benevolent insanity. Look at it how you will, your undertaking is quixotic in the last degree."

"So long as it is only that," he returned, "I don't see why you need set your face against it."

"It's the futility of it," she said, "that appeals to me. What you purpose doing is a job for the Supreme Court; and even the law cannot force a man to return to his wife against his will."

Dare made no answer to this. Had the position of affairs been simply as she believed it to be, he would not be undertaking this quest. An act of plain desertion would, as she had stated, have been a matter for the law to deal with. But the Arnotts' case had to be kept out of the courts if possible for Pamela's sake. He was very clear on that point. Pamela's mistake in continuing to live with Arnott after her discovery of the truth made secrecy vitally important. That was a point which Arnott had probably taken into consideration.

"You are a big fool, George," she said; "but I love you for your folly. I suppose most women admire quixotic men. I am going to be amenable now. I'll do my part, never fear. I'll stick to Pamela like a limpet. There's a difficult time ahead for her,—a storm of scandal to be faced; but we'll win through. Thank heaven! no one has ever been able to fling any mud at her!"

He gave her a quick look; she met it with a little uncertain laugh, and a light of indulgent affection in her eyes.

"We are creatures of circumstance," she added; "but we are not ruled by our passions,—not all of us."

To which Dare had nothing to say. He was very conscious at the moment of the dominating quality of his own passion; that he was not ruled by it was due rather to circumstances being against him than to any particular self-restraint. Had Pamela been willing to accept his proposal, he would have allowed no consideration to bar the way to their immediate marriage. As the case stood, however, his love was sufficiently strong and unselfish to move him to act as a disinterested friend who had at heart only an earnest desire to be of service to her. He meant to find Arnott, and persuade the man if possible to fulfil his obligation.

The quickest means of discovering Arnott's whereabouts, Carruthers suggested, and Dare considered the advice sound enough to follow, was to find Blanche Maitland, whose movements, if she were still in her professional capacity, would be easier to trace.

"Though what on earth he expects to do when he does run across them," Carruthers remarked to his wife, "beats me. Old George is off his balance."

"This business of sex is a big muddle," he commented later, philosophising while he undressed, to his wife's sleepy amusement. "Odd how it takes some fellows! ... Seems to knock the brains out of an average sensible chap. Never thought old George would go silly over somebody else's wife. It's in some fellows, that sort of thing."

He fussed about at the glass, and got into difficulties with his tie.

"Jolly glad he didn't develop a tender passion for you, old girl... Damn the thing!"

The tie came away in his hand and was flung into a drawer. He banged the drawer to with noisy impatience.

"It's just giving rein to one's feelings," he said, "that is the cause of it. One can't do that sort of thing,—it's not decent. It's like taking too much to drink because one enjoys the sensation of being drugged. We've got to observe the decencies of life; it's a social obligation. Pretty mess we'd make of things, if every one yielded to his impulses."

He approached the bed and seated himself on the side of it and stared at his wife with a perturbed expression on his usually good-humoured face. She blinked an eyelid open, and returned his gaze with a kind of one-sided attention, and a drowsy smile that mocked his serious mood. Dickie in the rôle of moralist was unfamiliar and mildly diverting.

"George isn't yielding to his impulses," she said; "he's acting in direct opposition to them."

"He's moonstruck over another man's wife," Carruthers returned; "and the other man is moonstruck over somebody else. What's that but encouraging one's fool sentimentalities? Some fellows enjoy messing about, and imagining themselves in love with every fresh face."

"The hunter's instinct," she murmured sleepily.

Carruthers grunted.

"It's abnormal vanity," he replied... "that, and suggestion... Just giving rein to unwholesome thoughts. I suppose, if I wanted to, I could work up that sort of feeling in respect to lots of women."

She opened both eyes at this, and regarded him with wide curiosity. Then she laughed.

"Silly old duffer!" she said. "I don't think George's influence is good for you. You had better get to bed, and leave off talking nonsense. I want to go to sleep."

Carruthers got off the bed and repaired to his dressing-room, there to continue his reflections on the sex problem while he proceeded with the business of undressing.

"It's nosing about for the scent of these things," he mused, taking off a shoe, and holding it in his hand with a contemplative eye upon it, as though the sight of this familiar object presented aspects hitherto unobserved. "If a man trains his mind to think along commonsense lines, his feelings don't run amok."

He dropped the shoe on to the carpet, and focussed his attention on the pattern of his socks.

"Gods! what a muddle it is!" he muttered... "A beastly lot of sentiment,—a beastly uncomfortable time of it,—and then,—reaction. And men go out of their way to tumble into these kind of messes. Hanged if I can understand it!"

The following morning he surprised his wife with the inquiry:

"Connie, were you ever in love before you met me?"

"Lots of times," she answered cheerfully.

"How was it you never married one of the crowd?" he asked, a trifle nettled by the unexpectedly frank reply.

"Because none of them asked me," she replied with extraordinary candour.

"Oh!" he said. He pondered this for a second or so. "I suppose you married me as a sort of substitute?" he added.

She gave a little amused laugh.

"Guess again," she said.

He went to her and put an awkward arm about her neck.

"Tell me," he entreated. "I'm a duffer at guessing."

"My reason for marrying you was precisely the same as yours for marrying me," she answered provokingly, and pulled the encircling arm closer. Carruthers bent his head and kissed her.

"There isn't a better reason," he affirmed in satisfied tones. "I guess we're all right."

That before breakfast talk had the effect on Carruthers of inducing a kindly mood which inclined him to view Dare's folly with greater toleration. He was even conscious of a certain sympathy with the man; his overnight impatience had moderated considerably. He threw out a few suggestions, intended to be helpful; and promised, without being asked, to keep Dare informed if anything transpired at that end.

Carruthers' cheerfulness had an irritating effect upon Dare. He had passed a sleepless night, kept awake by the worried thoughts which had harassed him throughout the long hours; by the passion of longing which possessed him, which refused, despite his utmost effort, to be subdued. He wanted Pamela, wanted her urgently,—and he was fool enough to be about to assist in bringing off a marriage between her and the villain who had spoilt her life. The irony of the situation struck him in its full absurdity. It was the consummation of a tragedy wearing comedy's mask,—the enforced marriage of a man and woman who had ceased to care for one another, for the sake of the new generation which had arisen as the result of their one-time passion.

Her decision was right, of course. It was the one unquestionably right step she had taken in the whole miserable affair. Because of its unanswerable equity he could only acquiesce.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Dare made inquiries in respect to the movements of the "Exotics," the musical troupe with which Blanche Maitland had associated herself, and without much trouble traced them to Bloemfontein, and came up with them there.

On the evening of his arrival in the town he attended a performance at which they were advertised to appear. He wondered as he took his seat in the hall whether he should find the girl he sought among the performers, or if she had severed her connection with the troupe in favour of a more private mode of life.

He gazed round the well-filled room with the object of ascertaining whether Arnott was present. He was not. It was not very likely, Dare decided, that he would be; to show up at these performances would suit neither his inclination nor his policy. Still, there was just a chance.

The room was very full. It was a popular entertainment at popular prices. Dare resolved to satisfy his curiosity and then leave; he could gain nothing from sitting through the entertainment, and the night was extraordinarily close. Fortunately the "Exotics" came on early in the performance. They were billed to appear again between the pictures toward the finish. Songs and character dances formed their repertoire.

Dare looked expectantly towards the platform as they came on. There were nine of them, men and women; the ninth being the accompanist. She walked on behind the others, and went straight to the piano, a tall, striking-looking figure, clad in blue and silver which scintillated a cold brilliance where the lights caught the filmy draperies. It was Blanche Maitland. The calm, unsmiling face, set off by the stage finery, and crowned with the dark glossy hair, aglitter with sham diamonds, looked handsomer than he had ever seen it; but there was something repellant, he thought, in its cold, unyielding beauty, something unyouthful in her air of composed aloofness. She moved and acted like some handsome automaton. Not once did he observe her smile, or display interest in what she was doing. She was wonderfully inanimate. And yet her performance at the piano was extraordinarily skilful, far and away above the ordinary run of talent heard at these entertainments. One felt one wanted to hear her in something worthier of her gifts.

Dare kept his seat until the performance came to an end; then he made his way behind, and sent his card in to her. He was not admitted to the dressing-rooms; but she came out and interviewed him in the passage, to the curious interest of one or two people who loitered there. She was manifestly surprised to see him, and pretended to have forgotten his name, and when and where they had met. He recalled the circumstances to her.

"It was so long ago," she said; "I had forgotten."

"I don't call that kind," he returned. "You see, I didn't forget I saw you in Johannesburg last month."

"Yes!" She looked at him with increased interest. "We were there, of course. We have been to several places since. We are working down towards the coast."

"It is a change for you, this life," he said. "Do you find it agreeable?"

"Oh! I don't know. It amused me at first. But I leave them at the coast. I came in as a stop-gap because their regular accompanist was ill."

Her voice sounded a little weary, her face, too, underneath the rouge, looked tired.

"I'd like to call on you to-morrow, if I may," he said, and paused expectantly.

She hesitated, regarding him with vague suspicion in her eyes. Then she mentioned the boarding establishment at which they were staying, and gave a reluctant permission. It was not a fashionable hostelry; presumably the "Exotics" were not flourishing in respect to funds.

"We might go for a drive," he suggested, "if you care about it."

She acquiesced, but without enthusiasm. It occurred to Dare that her manner was a little distrustful. He smiled encouragingly.

"That's kind of you," he observed. "I'm at loose ends in this place. Then I'll be round about three, if that suits."

He did not feel quite satisfied when he parted from her that she would keep the engagement; but on the following afternoon when he motored up to the house, she came out dressed for the drive and met him at the gate. He was aware, as he helped her into the car, of several curious faces watching them from the doorway and behind the dingy curtains of the front room windows. The "Exotics" were frankly interested in the proceeding, and watched the car and its occupants with eager, envious eyes until they were out of sight.

"I am glad you are giving up this life," Dare remarked to his silent companion, as they spun along in the sunshine with the light wind in their faces. "It's all very well in its way, I don't doubt; but it's just a trifle sordid, isn't it?"

"What is one to do?" she asked. "One must live. There isn't a wide choice for women, as you know."

"That's true," he acknowledged, and was silent for a moment. "Why did you give up teaching?" he asked abruptly.

She reddened and appeared distinctly annoyed.

"That isn't a vastly amusing, nor particularly lucrative form of earning a livelihood," she returned with sarcasm. "How do you know I was teaching?"

"I have recently been staying with the Carruthers," he replied. "Mrs Carruthers spoke of you. I told her I had seen you in Johannesburg."

Blanche looked deliberately away.

"Mrs Carruthers! Was she... She was my very kind friend formerly," she remarked in an embarrassed, hesitating way. "I should be sorry if she thought less kindly of me now."

"Why should she?" he asked.

She brought her face round again, and her eyes, steady and inquiring, met his fully.

"I don't think you are being quite sincere with me," she said.

Dare was unprepared for this direct attack. He felt at a decided disadvantage. She was much more shrewd than he had expected.

"Now, I wonder why you should think that?" he asked.

"Oh!" she exclaimed sharply. "Do you suppose I don't know that while you were in Wynberg you heard me discussed? I've got relations there; they write to me. The things people say!"

So already the gossip that was being circulated had reached her on her journeying. Dare scrutinised her closely, uncertain whether to treat her frankly as she seemed to wish, or to attempt to acquire the information he needed by less straightforward methods. In the end he resolved to be frank. Despite all that he had heard relative to her flight and her previous relations with Arnott, he had a strong persuasion that the stories concerning her were mostly lies. He discredited entirely the tale of her elopement. A girl does not run away with a man and leave him immediately to follow the kind of life she was at present leading. The fact that Arnott had been in Johannesburg at the same time that she was there called for some other explanation, he decided.

"Don't you think that perhaps you have your own indiscretion to blame for the stories that are being floated?" he asked.

His question seemed to surprise her.

"In what way should you say I have been indiscreet?" she inquired.

"The manner of your leaving is an open secret," he replied.

"There is no secret about it," she returned with some impatience. "I just went. In my opinion I was quite justified in acting as I did."

"Quite possibly you were," he allowed. "But unfortunately Mr Arnott acted in the same ill-considered manner. When people do these things they must expect gossip."

She did not reply to this. Dare judged from her silence that she was fully informed as to the manner of Arnott's leaving home. This seeming knowledge of the man's movements shook his faith in her somewhat.

"I suppose you think, with others, that circumstance had something to do with me?" she said presently.

"I would only believe that," he replied quietly, "if you told me so yourself."

She looked at him quickly, and then turned her face aside, unwilling that he should detect the shame in her eyes, and the gratitude that strove with other emotions at his unexpected answer. She knew so little of this man, who was but a

chance acquaintance; and yet already he appeared inexplicably mixed up in her life, acquainted with all the most intimate details concerning her. It puzzled her why he should display this interest in her affairs. She felt that she ought to resent his unwarranted interference; and yet oddly she did not feel resentful. It was after all rather a relief to have some one with whom to discuss these matters, which were too private and difficult to speak of with other people. His knowledge of events seemed to constitute a reason, if not a right, for his discussion of them. But his intimacy with the Arnotts, and with Mrs Carruthers, inclined her to be somewhat on her guard with him.

"I don't know why you should be less ready than others to believe the reports that are spread," she remarked. "Your knowledge of me is so slight. We've met—three times, is it?"

"I am not judging from my knowledge of you, but from my knowledge of human nature," he returned.

She laughed cynically.

"Has human nature revealed only its amiable qualities to you?" she asked.

"Oh! no. Not by any means. But humanity is not without a moral sense. The baseness which some natures reveal is a form of degeneracy,—a sign of mental abnormality. In the case of man or woman, deliberate viciousness denotes a kink somewhere."

She pondered this.

"Yes," she allowed; "you are probably right. But there are a good many people with kinks. I may have a kink myself... I believe I have."

"Then straighten it out," he advised.

"Oh!" she said in a voice of weary irritation. "What's the use of talking? Words are easy enough. It's easy enough, perhaps, to act, as well as think, finely when life runs smoothly. But life is terribly difficult for some of us—and dull. The dulness, I think, is the worst."

She stared out at the sunny landscape with hard, dissatisfied eyes, and the bitterness in her voice increased as she continued:

"I took up this kind of thing—touring and playing—because I thought I might find it brighter. It seemed so at first... the lights, and the people, and the noisy excitement of constant moving, constant change. Now I find that too unutterably dull. The tawdry dresses,—the limelight,—the sea of white faces, staring, always staring,—cold, unsympathetic, scarcely interested even. I hate them. I hate playing those ridiculous airs on timeless, indifferent pianos. I want something... I don't know... I'm a fool to say all this. I hope you didn't invite me to drive with you in the belief that you would find me an amusing companion?"

"I invited you to drive with me," he answered candidly, "because I wanted to talk to you on the subject which you, yourself, started. I am very anxious, for Mrs Arnott's sake, as well as in your own interest, to put a stop to a scandal which is none the less harmful because I believe it to be a tissue of falsehoods. Since you have heard the scandal, I am spared the unpleasant task of paining you further by repeating it. If you choose, I believe you can help me in stopping the thing. Will you tell me, if you can, where Mr Arnott is to be got at?"

"How should I know?" she asked, flushing.

"I thought you might know," he answered, unconvinced by her words of her ignorance as to Arnott's whereabouts. "He was in Johannesburg when you were there. I could have settled this matter then, had I known of it. But I've only just heard the talk. I want to see him. He ought to be informed of the report that is going about, which his own indiscretion is mainly responsible for. I think, if he knew, he would see the wisdom of putting an end to it."

"I don't," she replied unexpectedly. "I don't think it would make the least impression on him."

"Oh, come!" he said, surprised. "What grounds have you for supposing that?"

She glanced at the chauffeur's impassive back, and from it into Dare's curious, perplexed face.

"Do you think this quite the place for discussing these matters?" she asked.

Dare was obliged to admit the reasonableness of her remonstrance. Although they had spoken in lowered voices, they could not be positive that no part of their talk reached the driver's ears.

"We'll have tea somewhere," he said. "Then we will drive out into the country where we can get out and walk."

He leaned forward and gave the chauffeur his directions. When he turned to the girl again he was conscious of a new reserve which betrayed itself in her manner. She raised no objection to his arrangements; but a marked constraint showed in her speech. She fell back more and more upon silence and left the talking to Dare.

Chapter Twenty Four.

During tea, though there was ample opportunity for private talk at the little table where they sat alone, Dare was careful to avoid any reference to the business which had moved him to seek her out. He exerted himself to entertain her; and for the time it seemed as though Blanche actually forgot her discontent in enjoyment of the moment. But when on paying the score Dare would have bought her a box of chocolates, to his surprise the girl with hasty

ungraciousness declined the gift. She hated sweets, she said.

His action in purchasing chocolates for her had reminded her of Arnott and the similar gifts he had showered on her in the past. The incident jarred upon her; and a return of her former reserve ensued. Already she regretted having accepted the invitation for this outing. It was not that she disliked the man, or that she mistrusted him; but she had a presentiment that he would urge her to tell him things which it might be against her own interests to disclose. She sought to reassure herself with the thought that he could not force her confidence. Nevertheless she experienced a doubt as to her powers of reticence; she had already allowed him against her better judgment to discover that she was to a certain extent acquainted with Arnott's doings. And she had confessed to some authority as to his actions. That positive affirmation of the line he would be likely to take had been an indiscretion.

Dare was himself so quietly confident that the girl, having nothing to conceal, would aid him with any information which it lay in her power to give that he did not anticipate difficulty in persuading her to disclose her knowledge. He believed that she also would wish to have the scandal in which her name was concerned allayed finally. It could not be agreeable for her to know the opprobrious things that were being said of her in connection with the man. For her own sake she would wish that stopped.

They re-entered the car and continued the journey. When they were well out into the country, Blanche said, turning to him suddenly:

"Don't let us stop... What's the use? I don't want to walk; it's pleasanter driving. And I must not be late in getting back."

"I will see that you are back in ample time," he answered. "But I want you to get out here. You needn't walk far. I'll tell the man to wait for us at the bottom of this hill."

He spoke to the chauffeur, and the car stopped. Dare got out and helped the girl to alight. She looked at him with faint resentment in her eyes, as they remained standing together beside the road while the car drove swiftly away.

"I asked you not to," she said protestingly.

"I know," he said. "Forgive me for disregarding the request. I wanted to talk with you more privately. Plainly we couldn't discuss this matter before a third person."

"I don't wish to discuss it," she returned, getting off the road and beginning to walk in the direction taken by the car. "I fail to see why you, who are almost a stranger to me, should persist in discussing a subject which you must know is unpleasant for me to listen to. It is ungenerous of you to have brought me out with such an object."

"Oh! no," he replied. "I can't see it in that light. It is to your interest, as well as to Mrs Arnott's, to clear up this matter."

"Please leave me out of it. Would you," she asked, looking at him deliberately, "have taken so much trouble on my account?"

"Possibly not," he admitted. "But since it is my intention to get to the bottom of this business, I could wish at the same time to be of service to you. It is not good for a girl to have her name coupled with that of a married man. You would be well advised in helping me to stop the thing."

"It is easier to float a scandal than to stop one," she returned impassively.

She glanced up at him as they strolled along over the coarse grass, and smiled strangely.

"If you are acting for Mrs Arnott," she said, "you will have quite enough to do in covering the traces of an older scandal."

He looked down at her quickly, and their eyes met in a long gaze of challenge and inquiry. There was so much of significance in the girl's tones, in her eyes, and in her peculiarly malicious smile, that Dare had an uncomfortable conviction that she knew more of the Arnotts' affairs than he had supposed. He began to think that she was not as guileless as he had believed.

"To what do you refer?" he asked.

She stopped abruptly and confronted him with an air of sullen defiance, an increase of angry colour in her cheeks. Dare, perforce, halted also, and faced her, perplexed beyond measure and distinctly annoyed. This sudden change of mood, with its suggestion of open antagonism, took him aback. He was conscious of a revulsion of feeling which amounted almost to disgust. He regretted that he had wasted his time in seeking her.

"I don't know by what right you question me," she said. "If you want me to tell you certain things, you must explain your reasons. Confidence for confidence, Mr Dare."

"Very good," he answered coolly. "I want you to furnish me with Mr Arnott's present address, to save me trouble in discovering it for myself."

"Why do you want his address?" she inquired.

"I thought we had gone into that already," he replied. "I wish to persuade him to return to his home as the best and quickest means of ending this scandal."

She shook her head.

"He won't," she answered positively. "He can't... He's ill."

This information moved Dare to a show of surprise. For a moment he was inclined to discredit the announcement; but the girl's manner gave no indication that she was attempting to impose on him, and he accepted the statement as true. It was just possible that his illness accounted for Arnott's silence.

"I left him at Pretoria," she said, starting to walk again. "He is in a nursing home." She furnished the address. "They won't let you see him, if you go there," she added abruptly.

He made a note of the address on the back of an envelope, and scrutinised her with puzzled uncertainty as he returned the envelope to his pocket.

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

"Paralysis." She spoke curtly, with a kind of hard anger in her voice. "He will get better, but he will never be quite well. It will be a case for nursing—always."

He observed a rush of tears to her eyes, but there was no softening in her manner as she went on in dull, resentful tones:

"Everything that happens to me ends like that. If it hadn't been for this we were to have been married."

"Married!" he repeated, amazed. "You! ... But—"

"Oh! don't pretend," she interrupted impatiently, "that you don't know they aren't properly married... His wife is dead. I made him show me proofs of that when he asked me to marry him... He thinks I am going to marry him still."

"And are you?" he asked.

"I don't know... I hate sickness. But—he's rich. Money makes things so much easier."

He made a gesture of repulsion.

"You couldn't do a thing so vile as that, surely?" he said.

The horror and disgust he experienced at her callous reasoning revealed itself in his voice, in his eyes as he stared down at her, scarce able to credit what he heard. She looked back at him fiercely.

"How dare you talk to me like that? ... Can't you see all that such a marriage means to a girl like me? Why shouldn't I consider myself?"

"I was thinking of the woman who for years believed herself to be his wife," he replied coldly. "Now that he is free to marry her she has a right to demand that he should fulfil his obligation."

"He won't," she declared.

"I think he will," he answered confidently.

"You mean—" she began, and stopped, eyeing him with quick suspicion. "I wish I hadn't told you where he is," she cried passionately. "But they won't let you see him. He's not in a condition to be worried. You can't bully a man in his condition."

"I have no intention of bullying him," he answered, placing considerable restraint upon himself. "I am going to offer him the choice between two alternatives. If he is wise he will accept the only decent course open to him. The consequences of refusal will be awkward for him."

"You don't take into consideration," she said, with bitter anger in her voice, "that the threat with which you would intimidate him for your purpose is one which I also can use to oblige him to oppose you, if I wish. You are overlooking me."

"I simply never dreamed of insulting you by harbouring such a thought," he returned. "Even though you have flung the challenge, I couldn't believe you capable of that."

"You will need to reconstruct your theories on human nature," she said cynically.

"Oh! no. One instance of failure doesn't damn the race. I am not going to take up your challenge. I am going to regard it as a thing uttered with ill-considered haste. How you came by your knowledge puzzles me; but one point I feel fairly confident on is that you won't use it. Women don't do these things, Miss Maitland, whatever they may say in moments of anger."

"Oh! Women!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "You are fond of generalising. But in this case, it isn't women; it's just myself. I have got the chance I have always longed for. Do you think I am likely to let it slip? ... When he was taken ill so suddenly, and I feared he was going to die, I was nearly mad with anxiety. Then they told me he wouldn't die, that he would probably live for many years—with care... It was almost as great a shock to know that he was going to live and be—like that always. Do you think that woman, who calls herself his wife, will want him like that? ... Will be ready to devote her life to nursing him? I don't... Not when she learns the whole story."

"We will leave it to her to decide," he answered quietly.

The picture she drew of Arnott as a helpless invalid was not pleasant to dwell upon. It appealed to Dare in the light of a horrible injustice that Pamela should sacrifice herself to the care of an invalid husband, a man who had deceived and deserted her, who needed to be urged even then to return to her,—might possibly refuse to return. She would be wiser to yield to his entreaties and become his wife. He was not quite clear what legal relationship existed between Pamela and the man who had married her bigamously; but he had an idea that before she could be free of him it would be necessary for her to instigate divorce proceedings. He was not at all sure she would do that, even if Arnott refused to return to her. The whole affair was horribly complicated.

"The decision won't rest with her, nor with you," Blanche observed after a brief pause. "You can't coerce a man like Mr Arnott. He won't allow you to arrange his life."

She spoke with a sort of furtive admiration of the man whose dominating qualities and virile personality had first attracted her to him, and ultimately conquered her reluctance to the extent of gaining her consent to his proposal of marriage. She had left his home to protect herself from his less honourable intentions, had fled because she was afraid of him and uncertain of herself; and he had followed, determined to possess her at all costs. Finding her still obdurate, and less accessible than when she had lived beneath his roof, he had suggested marriage. His passion for her had become so imperative that it would brook no denial. No argument which prudence suggested could deter him from carrying out his purpose. He flung every consideration aside, as he had done once before when inflamed with his desire for Pamela; and Blanche, tempted by all that he could give her, as much as by the reciprocal passion he inspired, consented readily to his proposal. His sudden illness had interfered with the plan, had made it for the time being impracticable; but though she hesitated, appalled at the thought of a querulous invalid, husband in place of the vigorous man whose imperious strength had formed a large part of his attractiveness, Blanche had by no means abandoned the intention of marrying him. The worldly considerations which had influenced her in the past proved a strong inducement still.

With a sudden desire to end the talk, she increased the pace at which they were proceeding. Dare, as he kept step with her, maintained a constrained silence. He felt inadequate to cope with the ugly, sinister turn this affair had taken. He did not know what to say to the girl. There was nothing he could say that might not give fresh offence. She glanced up at him frowningly, incensed at this show of mute disapproval, and remarked:

"I've told you things it would have been wiser to have kept to myself. I don't know why I told you. You must treat what I have said as confidential, please."

"I can't promise that," he answered. "But I will keep your name out of this business as far as it is possible to do so. After all, there is nothing that you have told me that was not bound to come out. You couldn't marry a man who is known to have a wife and family, without the whole story coming to light. As soon as the facts are known Arnott will have to take his trial on a charge of bigamy."

She turned pale as she listened to him. It was borne in upon her that this man was going to prove a determined and implacable enemy. She felt instinctively that he meant to oppose her with all his strength.

"She will never prosecute him," she said, sullenly defiant.

"She won't need to," he answered convincingly. "The Crown will do that."

"You are trying to intimidate me," she exclaimed with sudden passion. "You have no right to threaten me."

He looked at her deliberately with a faint uplift of his brows.

"I am doing nothing of the sort," he answered. "I am merely making a plain statement of facts in order to show you what you will bring on the man you talk of marrying if you carry out your determination to encourage him in his cruel desertion of the woman he married. Only through you will the story of his crime ever come to be known."

She walked on with lowered gaze, making no reply.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Dare paced the little balcony outside his room that night for many hours, plunged in a gloomy reverie so made up of confused conjecture, of scraps of that afternoon's talk, of memories of other talks he had had with Pamela, and of doubts of Arnott, whose poor remnant of life she might still insist on linking with her own, that connected thought became impossible. His mind was a confusion of conflicting ideas that vied and strove with one another, and offered no solution of the complicated muddle of the human tragedy in which he was so inextricably involved.

On one point alone he was very clear: he did not wish Pamela to consolidate her marriage with Arnott. His love for her assumed proportions of vast magnitude, so that he lost sight of every other consideration save his own longing for her, and his repugnance for the idea of her bright life being passed at the side of the moral and physical wreck who did not want her, who would in all probability make her life with him a perfect hell.

Dare chafed at the picture his imagination conjured up, the picture which Blanche's words had brought vividly before him, of Arnott paralysed, helpless, dependent as a child upon the care of the woman he had treated so abominably, with nothing of love between them to help in lightening the strain. The idea was intolerable. He brushed it aside with a sense of intense disgust. He felt that something must be done to prevent the horrible injustice of this useless sacrifice on her part. He must bring reason to bear with her, must use every argument to induce her to relinquish this vain belief in a personal sacrifice as the only means of retrieving her former mistake. The thing was monstrous,

unthinkable; it must not be.

He went inside, switched on the light, and sat down to write to her.

"My dear," he began, and found it impossible to address her by name, so let it stand at that. "I hardly know what to say to you,—how to tell you what I have learnt since my arrival here. Things are pretty much as you suspected—worse, indeed. It may be a shock to you, but I don't feel that it can greatly distress you to hear that your husband is ill. He is never likely to be quite well again, if my information is correct I have yet to verify this account, though I have no reason for doubting its accuracy. I am going on to Pretoria, where he is, to find out what I can. I will write to you again when I am more fully informed."

He paused, and read the letter through with some dissatisfaction. Then he bent over the paper again, and wrote quickly, with a certain eagerness, as though the impulse which dictated what he wrote were irresistible in the flood of emotions that inspired it.

"It is not a bit of use your thinking of going on with this. The thing is impossible. My dear, it is not just for my own sake I urge you to reconsider your purpose. You can't do it. I can't bear the thought of your throwing away all chance of happiness for a man who has left you finally, and is now paralysed and practically helpless. It is self-murder. I won't permit it. I love you, and I want you badly..."

Suddenly Dare flung down the pen, and tore the letter into fragments, and burnt them with the aid of matches in the fireless grate.

"I can't write to her," he muttered. "It reads all wrong somehow. I must go to her. Things don't sound the same on paper. I've got to see her and speak to her. I must see her."

He went out on the balcony again, and resumed his walk and his troubled reflections, which helped not a whit in the solving of the muddle, but only aggravated his sense of the absurd futility of the sacrifice Pamela contemplated. Her resolve was the outcome, he was convinced, of purely intellectual reasoning. If she would only admit the factor of passion, the cold wisdom of her logic would go down before it, as the hardest of glaciers will dissolve adrift in tropic seas. It remained for him to go to her, and make her feel the powerful influence of human love,—force her to realise that, however much other considerations weighed in the great social scheme, love counted above everything, mattered more than anything else,—was the only thing really which did matter. It was the great fundamental principle of the entire universe. He never doubted that he could persuade her into seeing this thing as he saw it. The circumstances he felt justified him in the attempt.

The following day he took train for Pretoria. Before seeing Pamela it was necessary to investigate the truth of Blanche Maitland's story. Unless he faced her with facts he could not hope to prevail with her, and his facts must be acquired at first hand.

Dare was essentially a man of action. To decide on a certain course with him was to pursue it without delay to the finish. He meant, if possible, to see Arnott himself. But when he arrived at Pretoria, and applied at the address which Blanche had given, he was confronted with the first difficulty; without the doctor's sanction he could not be admitted to the invalid's presence. Arnott's condition was sufficiently grave to make the most stringent rules with regard to the sick-room absolutely imperative.

It being near the time for the doctor's visit, he decided to wait in order to see him. He had given up the hope of an interview with Arnott. Clearly the man was not in a condition to discuss the painful subject of his domestic complications. That matter would have to be left in abeyance until he was well enough to cope with such things. The delay irked Dare, but it was unavoidable. He sat in the little waiting-room at the open window, and read a book of epitaphs, intended to be humorous, but which struck him as dreary reading, and an odd selection for the waiting-room of a nursing home. He was relieved when the doctor came in,—a young man with an energetic manner, and a display of haste. His greeting of Dare was somewhat curt: the interviewing of his patients' friends was not in his opinion part of his day's work; and he was obviously anxious not to be delayed. He did not sit down. Dare, who had risen, remained standing also.

"I understand," the doctor said, "that you are a friend of Mr Arnott,—that you wish to see him?"

"I called with the purpose of seeing him," Dare answered, carefully ignoring the first part of the speech. "His people are anxious for news of him."

The doctor looked doubtfully at the speaker. He had wondered why, save for the young woman who had called repeatedly during the first days after the patient's admission to the home, and had manifested great distress at his condition, no one belonging to him had troubled even to make inquiries as to his progress. He had concluded that there was no one sufficiently interested in him to feel concern on his account.

"I am reluctant to allow any one to see him for the present," he said. "He is getting on; but we have to avoid anything that might be likely to excite him. There is trouble with the brain unfortunately."

"That is worse than I had anticipated," Dare said, shocked and disconcerted by this intelligence. "Will you please tell me, so far as it is possible to judge at this stage, what the result of this illness is likely to be? Is he to be an invalid for life?"

"Well, it is paralysis, you know," the doctor answered, "and a bad case. Chronic alcoholism is mainly responsible. He will be able to walk, we hope—with the aid of sticks, of course. But his brain will never be quite clear. He may, however, live a long while."

"That is to be regretted in the circumstances," Dare observed drily.

The doctor agreed with him, but he did not say so. His business was to patch the man up, and he was doing his best to attend to it. He furnished a few more details, and held out vague hopes of an improvement in the mental condition. The patient had a good constitution, though he had done his utmost to ruin it; and if not crossed or excited, or worried with business matters, the brain would become stronger, though it would never be normally active again.

Dare gathered from the fragmentary talk that Arnott was to be a semi-imbecile, just able to crawl about,—a reversion, in short, to childhood with the hideous defects of decrepit age to make the reversion more horrible. The information turned him sick. He was thankful to leave the place and get out again into the sunshine. He no longer desired to see Arnott. To reason with a man in that condition was impossible. Arnott had become a mere cipher in the drama, the finishing act of which had to be decided between Pamela and himself. It was unthinkable that she should persist in devoting the future to his wreck of humanity, to whom she owed no debt of duty, who had merely used her for his pleasure, and discarded her when he tired through his infatuation for a younger woman, which obsession possibly his failing mental faculties were responsible for.

Dare left Pretoria the same day, and started on the long return journey to the coast. He was impatient to see Pamela, and at the same time extremely nervous at the prospect of his interview with her. He did not know what to say to her, how to break to her the brutal fact of Arnott's contemplated marriage, his determined and ruthless desertion of herself. The man's actions, before his illness prevented the carrying out of his designs, pointed conclusively to a deranged intellect. With the cunning of latent insanity he had arranged his plans, counting on Pamela's silence in respect to his bigamous marriage with her, utterly regardless of the stir which the scandal of his marriage with Blanche must create in circles where he was known to have a wife and children already. To a man in full possession of his faculties the impossibility of concealing the crime of bigamy would have been apparent, unless he fled the country and married under an assumed name.

What, he wondered, would Pamela decide upon doing when she learnt the entire truth? He could not tell. The uncertainty was nerve-racking. He fretted and worried himself with conjectures all through that tedious, seemingly unending journey,—during the hot dusty days as the train rushed through the Karroo, and throughout the long sleepless nights when, kept awake by his thoughts, he turned in weary discomfort in his narrow berth in the darkened compartment, and longed for the coming of day.

When he reached the terminus he despatched a telegram to Pamela to inform her of his arrival, and his intention of calling upon her the following morning. Then he took a taxi and drove to the Mount Nelson. He dined and went to bed, and slept soundly for the first time since leaving Pretoria.

Pamela did not sleep at all. The unexpected receipt of Dare's telegram excited her, and kept her on the rack of expectation. She had not looked for him to return. The telegram was the only communication she had received from him, and it told her nothing, save that he was back and wished to see her. She knew that he must have something of importance to tell her or he would not have turned back so soon.

The thought of the coming interview was vaguely disquieting. So much had passed between her and this man of a painful and intimate nature that all the barriers of conventional friendship were down, and left her exposed, as he was, to the onslaught of each new emotion inspired by their mutual feeling. She had thought of him so much since he had pleaded his cause with her, and she had admitted her own love for him,—had reviewed all their pleasant intercourse of the past, his kind, patient, and unselfish devotion which later, in accepting her decision, had yet lent itself to aid her in her unprotected and difficult position, that the love which she had confessed to bearing for him had strengthened considerably. She looked up to him as to some one strong and fine and worthy of a woman's entire trust. Never for the man she had believed to be her husband had she felt this reverence of love. She had admired him, had felt grateful to him for his passionate ardour for herself. Their marriage had proved a delirious period of excitement and delight, until his passion cooled; but it had never roused in her a lofty conception of love, or helped her to realise the seriousness of life's responsibilities. Her life as Arnott's wife had tended rather to lower the standard of fine thinking, and reduce the principles of living to the sensuous indolence of self-gratification, and an immense concentration upon the importance of purely personal things. She had lived for herself, detached in sympathy from the wider world about her, careless of the joys and sorrows of others as something altogether outside her life. And now sorrow had brought her into touch with the world, had broadened her sympathies and her understanding, and decreased proportionately the sense of her personal significance.

What is any life, however important to itself, however aggrandised by the world's recognition, however necessary it may appear to others—to one other even, but a breath which expands the lungs of the universe and leaves them temporarily deflated as it passes on into the beyond?

Chapter Twenty Six.

Pamela was alone and waiting for Dare when he presented himself at the house on the following morning. She turned slowly when the door of the room opened, and advanced to meet him with a look of inquiry and of welcome in her eyes.

She looked better, he observed, than when he had last seen her; the anxiety that had sharpened her features and shadowed her face with an expression of dread had yielded to a new calm, which suggested a mind braced and prepared to meet and accept whatever offered. Her composure helped him enormously in quieting his nervousness, which before, and at the moment of, his entry had been excessive. He took her extended hand and held it.

"You bring me bad news?" she said, observing his grave face with a watchful scrutiny, and speaking in that quiet,

level voice that one uses sometimes in discussing things too serious and strange for ordinary emotion. "I felt it must be bad news when your telegram arrived... You've seen him?"

"No," he answered.

He led her to the sofa near the French window on which he had sat with her before when they had had their last interview. The memory of that former occasion was present in his mind. It was possibly present in Pamela's mind also; but the recollection caused no sense of embarrassment. Her love for, and confidence in, him had swept all feeling of constraint away. He seated himself beside her.

"I wrote to you," he said; "but I decided not to send the letter. I felt it was best to come down and explain. Mr Arnott is in Pretoria. I went there for the purpose of seeing him; but he is ill, and unable to see any one. I had an interview with the doctor who is attending his case. I thought you would wish to know exactly how matters are with him."

He paused. Pamela was gazing at him with wide serious eyes. She showed less surprise than he had expected. She appeared somehow prepared, and extraordinarily calm. It made the telling easier. It was as though she had passed the final stage of emotionalism, had come through all the stresses of anguished uncertainty, of distressed and tormented doubt and wounded love, and emerged calm-eyed and efficient, amazingly controlled, and clear as to her judgment. She listened attentively without interrupting him. When he paused, she said:

"You are not preparing me to hear that he is dead?"

"No," he answered. His feelings got the better of him, and he added bluntly,—“I would to God I were! Life—all that is left of it for him—isn't worth the having. And anyway, living or dead, he isn't worthy of one thought of your compassion.”

"Then he did go away with Blanche?" she said quietly.

"He followed her. He meant to marry her—means to marry her still, if her statement is to be believed. I saw her in Bloemfontein. It was she who told me of his illness."

"What is the matter with him?" she asked, her earnest eyes holding his, questioning his, refusing, it occurred to him, to allow what he was telling her to bias her ultimate judgment. She had accustomed herself to ugly truths; she was not shocked or dismayed any longer, only anxious to have her worst fears confirmed or disproved. She desired to hear the whole truth, whatever it held of pain or humiliation. At least it could hold no disillusion for her.

"He has had a stroke of paralysis, they tell me," Dare answered, avoiding her eyes.

He was conscious of a sudden movement on her part, of a quick, inaudible exclamation which was followed by a sharp indrawing of her breath. He did not look at her; he felt, without seeing them, that there were tears of pity and of horror shining in her eyes. He counted for something to her still. She was sorry for the man. Dare felt unreasonably incensed.

"There is hope of a partial recovery," he continued dully, trying to keep under the sudden sharp jealousy that gripped him as nothing he had experienced in all their former talks had gripped and hurt. "He'll get about again, they think... walk a little. His brain is affected—slightly. That will never be quite clear again..."

He broke off abruptly, and turned to her in protesting surprise. She was weeping. The tears were welling in her eyes and coursing down her cheeks. Arnott ill—broken—touched the deepest springs of her compassion. All the bitterness in her heart against the man who had so cruelly wronged her melted into sorrow for him in his terrible affliction. She no longer experienced any anger against him, only a great pity,—pity for the miserable wreckage of his health, which stood, it seemed to her, as a symbol of the wreckage of their love,—all the promise and the strength and the beauty gone for evermore,—only the dead ashes remaining in the furnace of life.

"Your tears are a big return for his cruelty to you," he said, trying with ill success to hide the twinge of jealousy which caused him to wince at sight of her grief. "Some people might consider his condition a perfectly just retribution. You owe him nothing—not even pity."

"One doesn't only render what is due," she said, wiping her eyes slowly. "That would make life too hard. Could you expect me to hear unmoved what you have just told me? I thought I had schooled myself to bear anything; but this is too awful. I would rather have heard that he was well and happy—with her."

"She is going to him," he said, bluntly.

"Going to him? ... Now?" Pamela's tone expressed wonder. "You mean, she loves him sufficiently to marry him—ill—like that?"

"I mean," he returned, watching her narrowly, "that she loves herself sufficiently to put up with his condition on account of his wealth. She admitted that almost in as many words. It's as much as he has any right to expect."

"Oh! no," she said quickly. "He is giving her more than that."

She was silent for a moment, looking thoughtfully beyond him towards the garden which showed through the aperture of the long window, a fair and peaceful background, in striking contrast to the tension within the room and the unquiet of her mind. Dare's gaze never left her face. He was watching her continually, trying to gauge her intention from his study of her expression. The slow tears still fell at intervals; but they became fewer, and she wiped them mechanically with a small drenched handkerchief, making no effort at concealment from him. It seemed as if in her preoccupation she was scarcely conscious of his presence.

"It's a sordid story," he said. "I am sorry to have to distress you with it; but you had to know... It closes everything, you see,—puts a finish to your part in his life. He has flung aside his responsibilities deliberately. A man like that, devoid of all moral sense, cannot be influenced. I doubt you would accomplish anything, if you went to him."

"At least, I must make the effort," she said slowly. She turned to him, a look of sad entreaty in her eyes, as though she would appeal to him to help, instead of making things more difficult for her. "Don't try to dissuade me," she pleaded earnestly. "Don't fail me. I am relying so much on your help."

"But," he urged gently, "don't you realise how impossible this thing has become? Think, even if you succeeded in persuading him to return—which I doubt strongly you could succeed in doing—what would your life be like with him,—half-imbecile, helpless, an invalid always? ... It's too horrible to contemplate."

She shuddered at the picture of Arnott which he drew, and hid her white face in her hands and said nothing.

"It's not as though you owe him anything," he insisted. "It's not as though you love him any longer, or can even give him what he wants—that girl, however little she brings him, can give him more than you. You are for defeating happiness all round, you see. It's not worth it. I understand your reason for wishing to do this, but I can't feel it justifies it in any sense."

He put an arm about her and drew her to him and held her close.

"Cut it, Pamela," he said. "I'll take you home to England. We'll be married quietly over there—or in Europe somewhere. It will be better for the children in the long run, dear, believe me. I can't get reconciled anyhow to the idea of giving you up. You belong to me. I've a right to you. I have loved you always, from the day I saw you first at that tournament so many years ago. Arnott robbed me of you then. I can't let him step in a second time and take you from me... Believe me, Pamela, I wouldn't try to stand between you and what you consider to be a duty if I saw any possible chance of happiness in it for you at all,—if even I could feel that the result might justify the sacrifice. It won't. It will be just death in life for you both. And it's going to be pretty hard on me too. I could put up with that, if it spelt happiness for you; but it doesn't. Pamela, is it worth it? cheating ourselves for a principle that isn't going to work any solid good for any one?"

He drew her head to his shoulder, and gathered her closer in his arms and kissed her, keeping his face pressed to the tear-wet cheek, feeling the trembling of her body lying passive in his arms, and the little choking sobs which escaped her as she wept in his embrace. Would she yield, he wondered? Had she not in surrendering to his caresses partly yielded already?

"It is asking too much of human nature to expect us to give up everything," he said. "I want you. I am lonely without you. It isn't a case of making love,—a phase of feverish emotions. I love you honestly, earnestly. I want you day after day. I want your companionship. I want you to fill my life, as I shall hope to fill yours. I want you at my side—always. Pamela, my dearest, you are not going to snatch my hope away from me for no more solid reason than the fulfilment of an imaginary duty which is going to benefit no one? Life—without you—is empty for me."

"Oh! my dear!" she sobbed. She lifted her face to his and kissed his lips. "I want to do as you wish. I want to take the easy course; but the other is the right course. It isn't just happiness that is at stake. It is neither love for him, nor any sense of obligation to him, that makes me desire to marry the father of my children... It's just the knowledge of what is due to them. They count first. They have to be considered. Do you think I don't realise," she added passionately, withdrawing herself from his arms, "that I shall hate my life with him,—that—God forgive me I—I shall possibly hate him? ... hate him more every year, until even pity for him dies beneath the strain of constant weariness, daily resentment. What you offer tempts me sorely. It's just dragging me to pieces to refuse you. Life with you would be a good and happy thing. I want it, and I can't have it. But it is denying you which hurts more than denying myself. My dear!—my dear! I wish you didn't care so much. What can I do? ... What can I say?"

"You can do," he answered, looking at her steadily, "what I ask you to do, and leave the future of the children more safely in my hands than in their father's. His example can be no possible guide for them. His influence in the home will tend neither towards their happiness nor their good. At most, you can give them his name—they have a right to that, as it is. Think, Pamela... Isn't your idea of what is right for them merely a morbid fancy? Let the man go. You've lost your hold on him. Leave him to finish the muddle he has made of his life in his own way. He has proved himself incapable of faithfulness. It isn't decent that you should continue to live with him. I show you a way out,—take it. Put yourself unreservedly in my hands."

"That's shirking," she said. "I've always shirked."

"What else is there for you to do?" he asked. "You can't straighten a muddle which is none of your making. There's a duty you owe to yourself,—you're overlooking that Shake yourself free of this life which is hurtful to you in every sense, and give me the right to protect you, to act and think for you. I can't countenance what you think of doing. I'm going to use my utmost effort to dissuade you. See here," he said. He took a note-book from his pocket, and wrote the address of the Pretoria Home upon a page which he tore out and handed to her. "Write to the doctor there, and ask him to give you all particulars of Arnott's case. He will possibly tell you more than he told me."

"His condition makes no difference," she answered, reading the address he handed to her before putting the paper away. "Ill or well, it doesn't affect the main point."

"I know," he said. "But you ought to ascertain what you can before taking any decisive step. Then, if you wish to see him, I will take you there."

At this suggestion, which she had not before considered, she glanced at him in quick dismay.

"I don't think—I could go to him," she said, hesitating nervously. "I... He must come home."

"That, of course," Dare answered, infinitely relieved, "is as you wish."

The possibility of Arnott consenting to return occurred to him as very unlikely.

"You've got to face the chance of his refusal," he added abruptly. He leaned towards her. "If he refuses, Pamela?—He may, you know."

She turned to him and laid a hand impulsively upon his arm.

"Don't tempt me to hope he will do that," she said. "Be strong for both of us... I want you to be strong."

He took her face in his hands and held it for a moment looking deeply into her eyes.

"Aren't you demanding rather much of me," he asked, "to insist that I should aid you in my own defeat? I'm only human, Pamela."

She answered nothing, but placing her hands on his wrists, she pulled his hands from her face and carried them to her lips. At this unexpected act on her part Dare coloured awkwardly. The next moment he had seized her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. As abruptly as he had seized her, he released her and stood up. He pulled himself together with an effort, and walked as far as the window, where he paused for a second or so, and then turned and came slowly back, and stood above her, looking down into the sweet, upturned face.

"When I came to you this morning," he said, "I had only one purpose,—to win you,—to make you see that the only thing that really matters is our love for one another. I feel that still. It's the only thing that counts with me. But I'm not going to worry you any more. You've got to follow your conscience in this. I think you're wrong... time may prove you wrong. If it does, or if you fail in this, I count on you to let me know. I shall always be at hand—waiting. You'll summon me, Pamela, when the time comes?"

"Yes," she whispered.

She gazed into the strong face above her, sad now, and rather stern; and the thought of all that she was losing in sending him out of her life gripped her heart like icy fingers closing about the happiness of life. And while she sat there, and he stood over her, gravely silent, the gay sound of childish laughter broke upon the stillness, followed by the quick patter of little feet along the stoep. Dare looked round.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "you've got them."

The bitterness in his voice did not escape her. She understood what he was feeling, and, rising, she went to him and placed a hand gently on his arm.

"The best thing that life has given me is your love," she said. "There is no sting of bitterness in that at all."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Dare remained in Cape Town for a while. Pamela had written to the doctor at Pretoria; and he waited to learn the result of his report, and hear what she decided upon doing. If she changed her mind about going up he meant to make the journey with her.

The report when it came differed very slightly from what he had told her. Arnott was making steady progress: it would be possible to move him shortly if Mrs Arnott wished. The doctor intimated that if she desired to see her husband there was no reason against it.

Pamela showed the letter to Dare, and discussed with him the question of whether she ought to go, whether in the circumstances it might not do more harm than good. She was obviously reluctant to follow the doctor's suggestion, and at the same time convinced that it was little less than a duty. Dare felt himself inadequate to advise her.

"In any case," he said, "you will need to explain to the doctor that your presence might be likely to excite the patient. You can't keep him in the dark."

Pamela considered this.

"I think," she said presently, looking at him a little uncertainly, "it would be easier to explain things personally,—easier than writing. I think perhaps it would be best to go. You think that, don't you?"

"Yes," he answered. "If you are going through with the thing, it's no good jibbing at obstacles. When you have made up your mind I'll see about tickets, and make all arrangements for the journey."

"You are going with me?" she asked.

"Of course," he answered. "You don't suppose I would allow you to go alone? I'm seeing you through to the finish."

She looked at him with grateful eyes.

"I am so dreading this," she said. "I don't know how I should manage alone. I'm growing altogether to depend on you. It isn't fair to you."

But Dare would not allow this.

"It's the one return you can make me," he insisted,—“if there is any return called for. I am glad to be of any little service to you.”

To be of service to her was the only thing left him. This journey which he proposed making with her was the last opportunity, he supposed, that he would have of enjoying her society; the end of the journey meant the parting of the ways for them. He had no idea how the prospect of the future appealed to her, but for him it held little in the way of hope or interest. He would go on with his work, and get what satisfaction he could out of that,—it offered scope, and interest of one sort. Had she consented to marry him he would have retired and gone home; there was no necessity for him to follow his profession; but without her, work became a necessity of itself. Too much leisure would only conduce to thought.

He supposed that in time he would become reconciled to his disappointment; but for the present he could only realise the bitterness of the loss of a happiness which fate had seemed to place within his grasp, and had then wrested from him again with wanton caprice. He still held to it that Pamela was wrong in her decision; but while he could not persuade her into recognising her mistake, he was obliged to acquiesce in it. In his brain there lingered a faint hope that the journey to Pretoria would accomplish what he had failed to do,—that the meeting with Arnott would convince her of the impossibility of reuniting their severed lives. Since it was a matter of principle only with her, against which her nature revolted, he did not feel that there was any disloyalty in desiring her defeat. It would be best for her in the long run, and her good mattered to him equally with his own.

If occasionally a doubt crept into Pamela's mind as to the ultimate result of her journey, she did not encourage it. There were certainly moments when she shrank from her self-imposed task, moments when she longed to give in, to take the happiness Dare offered and let the rest go. But reflection invariably induced a calmer mood, in which the impossibility of surrendering to love, with the past like a black shadow of disgrace between her and the happiness this man could give her, was painfully manifest. She had married Arnott, had clung to him when she knew she was not legally his wife; to refuse her obligation now were to degrade herself to the level of the women who subordinate honour to pleasure, who have neither a sense of responsibility nor any sort of pride. She had trailed her flag in the mud once; it was given to her now to raise it and cleanse it from the mire. She trusted that she would have the strength to go through with her undertaking to the finish.

The question that presented the greatest difficulty in leaving home was how to arrange about the children. To leave them to the sole care of coloured servants was impossible. Mrs Carruthers solved this difficulty as soon as she heard of Pamela's intended journey. She carried them off to her own home, rather pleased to be enabled by some practical form of usefulness to salve a conscience which reproached her for her hasty and, as she believed, unjust suspicions of Arnott, whose illness, explaining the mystery of his silence, had closed the scandal attending on his disappearance.

Dare, in supplying her with details of the illness, had carefully omitted all mention of Blanche, and her part in Arnott's life. It would come with all the shock of a fresh scandal if by their subsequent acts they revived the talk which had coupled their names already, and still reflected discreditably on the girl. He felt that the girl had yet to be reckoned with. She might prove a more formidable obstacle in Pamela's path than the miserable wreck who had deserted her. Since her sole purpose was gain it would perhaps be possible to buy her off. But that eventuality would be a last consideration; purchased silence is expensive, and often dangerous. Dare had no intention of exposing Pamela to blackmail. Any money transaction that passed must be made through himself, and kept from the Arnotts' knowledge. In the matter of Blanche Maitland he meant to exercise his own discretion. He desired if possible to keep her and Pamela from meeting. It formed one of his reasons for accompanying Pamela on her journey.

Mrs Carruthers, when she heard of this purpose of Dare's, pronounced it the maddest of the many mad acts he had committed in connection with this affair. He was acting, in her opinion, with amazing indiscretion.

"Does it never occur to you that you are likely to get Pamela talked about?" she asked him.

"What is there to cause talk?" he inquired, feeling oddly irritated at her persistent opposition.

"Well, your devotion isn't exactly normal."

"Normal?" he said.

"Usual, if you prefer it," she conceded. "It's practically the same thing. Disinterested service is a virtue ordinary human intelligence cannot grasp."

"That is, perhaps, less the fault of human intelligence," he returned, "than the misuse of service."

"No doubt," she allowed. "Nevertheless, we suffer vicariously through that same misuse. But it's no good talking. You have made up your mind. If it wasn't for how you feel about her the thing wouldn't be so outrageous; but under the circumstances..."

She broke off and looked at him with perplexed, baffled eyes. Dare realised dimly what a puzzle and a disappointment he had become to her. She had at one time, he was aware, regarded herself as an influence in his life. He almost smiled at the thought Influences are only powerful so long as one is satisfied to submit to them; with the first sign of breaking away, control ends.

"I'll bring her to the station and see you off, anyway," she finished.

"That will," he assured her, smiling openly now, "add an air of immense respectability to the adventure."

The arrival of the little Arnotts, with their nurse, a considerable amount of luggage, and numerous toys, gave Mrs Carruthers something else to think of, and detached her mind successfully from Dare and his misplaced affections. She had suggested that the children should come to her the day before Pamela left in order to see how the plan worked, and also with the object of allowing their mother leisure in which to make her own hurried preparations for the journey. When Carruthers got back that evening he found them already installed in his home; and his wife, who, in making her arrangements, had not consulted him, was reminded at sight of his amazed face that what she regarded in the light of an agreeable duty he might view altogether differently.

"I believe I actually forgot that I possessed a husband," she said.

She regarded him for a second with bright, amused eyes.

"They've come to stay," she announced. "I've adopted them—indefinitely."

Carruthers demanded an explanation, and emitted a low dismayed whistle when he learnt that their mother was going to Pretoria and might be away some weeks.

"But she hasn't gone already?" he said, collapsing into a chair on the stoep, and reluctantly submitting to having his foot used for the unnatural purpose of equestrian exercise by Pamela's small son, who with his sister was enjoying amazingly this unexpected change of residence.

"No. But I thought it advisable to have them on trial before she left. They go to-morrow."

"They!" Carruthers ejaculated.

"George is going with her," she explained, with a smiling shrug of her shoulders.

She watched the children, who were sprawling all over her husband to his manifest discomfort, and, surveying the grouping, laughed.

"You look quite nice as the father of a family," she observed. "I wish they belonged here by right."

"I don't," he answered fervently.

"I kept them up for a romp with you before they go to bed; but I am going to bundle them off now," she said. "If you make a practice of coming home a little earlier you will have a longer time with them."

"I shall make a practice of getting back half an hour later in future," he returned grimly, and rose from his seat in order to shake off his tormentors.

Mrs Carruthers laughed brightly.

"Pamela will be in presently," she said, and stooped and lifted the boy in her arms. "Tell her to come upstairs to us. She and George dine here to-night."

She held the boy up for a good-night kiss. Carruthers very unexpectedly put his arm about her shoulders, and drew her with the boy in her arms close to him, and kissed them both. He stared after her as she went inside with the children, and then turned thoughtfully away and sat down again in his former seat.

"God forgive me for a miserable sinner!" he mused. "But I'm not cut out for a family man. Though I suppose if the little beggars really belonged here I'd get accustomed to it."

Pamela, coming up the garden path a few minutes later, discovered him sitting there with the same lugubrious expression of face, and his hands deep in his pockets, a perplexed and very much worried man.

He rose when she came near, and went to meet her, scrutinising her with greater attentiveness than usual as she advanced, a little pale and preoccupied, but looking surprisingly pretty and sweet and composed. He detected a new quality in her manner, a certain quiet force that was restful rather than assertive, and in her wistful eyes, behind the sorrow that dwelt there lately, shone a tender gleam of happiness that had its secret springs in the realisation and support of an unselfish human love which opened for her a door that had long been closed, and let in a new light and sweetness upon her life. Carruthers supposed, unable otherwise to account for the change in her bearing, that the news of her husband's illness had softened her, and healed the breach between them.

"Come in to have a look how the crèche you have started here is getting along?" he asked, shaking hands. "My authority in this house is seemingly a negligible quantity, judging from my wife's act in setting up an orphanage during the brief hours of my absence. She wants to stick to them too."

"I do hope," Pamela said, laughing, "that you won't find them a great nuisance. It is such a comfort to me to leave them here. But I had qualms about you when Connie proposed it."

"That's more than she had," he replied.

"They are fairly good on the whole, you will find," she said dubiously.

"Every mother thinks that," he retorted. "I don't doubt they are as troublesome as the general run of youngsters. They were here five minutes ago, and all over me. Blest, if they don't seem more at home than I am. Your daughter is a forward little hussy, and as pretty as—well, as her mother. What!"

He smiled at her encouragingly, and leaned with his back against the rail of the stoep, observing her as she stood

bareheaded beside him, with only a light wrap over her thin dress.

"So you are going to Pretoria?" he said. "I hope you will find your husband better when you get there. If you want any arrangements made at this end, I'll see to it. I suppose you intend to bring him down?"

"I hope to," Pamela answered a little doubtfully. "It depends on—on circumstances."

"Of course," he agreed. "No good hurrying him. We'll look after the youngsters all right. You need not have them on your mind, anyway."

"No," she said, with a quick look of gratitude at him. "You have relieved me of that worry entirely."

"My share in it isn't much," he answered, smiling. "As you may have noticed, my wife generally gets her own way. She has always wanted babies, and now she has got 'em. She's upstairs with them now. I was to tell you to go up. The invitation, I understand, does not extend to me."

Pamela made a move towards the entrance. At the door she paused and looked back at him over her shoulder.

"You're a dear," she said softly, and went inside.

"That's the worst of these ingratiating women," Carruthers reflected. "They always contrive to get round one somehow."

Chapter Twenty Eight.

The mood in which Dare started on the journey to Pretoria was one of mingled sensations. A persuasion of irreparable loss qualified the immediate satisfaction he experienced in being uninterruptedly alone with Pamela. The joy he felt in having her to himself, withdrawn from outside influences, from ties and conventional restrictions, was considerably reduced when he reflected that this present close companionship was the forerunner of a more complete separation than any they had previously known. They were acting in deliberate concert in closing all the tracks which had led to the converging of their life paths, making it impossible that they should ever cross again. In doing this together they lost sight for the time of the reality of parting. There was a flavour of adventure in the proceeding which Dare at least appreciated; although it foreshadowed the inevitable parting, it seemed to set it further apart,—a vague forbidding cloud which threatened to break and deluge them later, but loomed remotely on the horizon of the present, a misfortune that some unforeseen agency might yet avert.

Pamela remained very quiet and still during the first hour of the journey. The excitement and bustle of departure, with Mrs Carruthers and the children, a noisy and somewhat unmanageable group about the door of the compartment which Dare had secured to themselves, left her slightly depressed when it subsided. She leaned from the window as the train glided out of the station, waving her handkerchief to the children, whom Mrs Carruthers grasped determinedly one by either hand, until the train bore her from their view; then, dispirited, conscious of the abrupt reaction, she sank back in her seat, the sudden tears smarting under her eyelids at the sense of loneliness which the fading of the bright faces, the cessation of the gay childish voices, induced.

Dare busied himself with the disposition of the baggage and refrained from noticing her. It occurred to him that she might feel some slight embarrassment in the first moments of realising how completely she was cut off from outside things in this solitude of days to be passed in his sole company. He believed that she had not taken into consideration the fact of this uninterrupted intercourse to which he had looked forward with such eagerness; that aspect of the journey had probably never presented itself to her mind. In which surmise he was entirely right; Pamela had not considered the matter of their complete isolation. When it dawned upon her it did not, however, cause her any embarrassment. She was less self-conscious than Dare in respect to their relations. It never occurred to her to disguise from herself or from him the comfort and pleasure she derived from his friendship. When one is facing serious issues the smaller concerns of life assume a proportionate insignificance; and the appearance of one's actions ceases to disturb the mind confident that its motives are right.

When Dare, having settled things in their places, sat down opposite to her and offered her a pile of periodicals to help pass the time, she put them down on the seat beside her, and evinced a disposition to talk.

Pamela had done so little travelling in the Colony that she was interested in the scenery, and immensely impressed with its magnificence, as any traveller must be, seeing it for the first time. Had it not been for the serious object of the journey, she would have enjoyed the experience thoroughly; but the thought of Arnott, of meeting him, of the possible difficulty of persuading him to return with her, as well as the shock of his illness, damped her spirit, hung over her like a nightmare. She was terribly afraid that this man who had treated her so infamously would refuse her request even now. The contemplation of enforcing the fulfilment of his obligation by a threat of proceeding against him chilled her. If it came to the point, she could not, she felt, do that.

"It's wonderful—this," she said, gazing out of the window at the wide sweep of country through which they were passing. "I've never been up the line before. It's new to me, travelling through sunlit spaces like this. See the flowers in the veld. I can smell them as we pass."

He looked from the window with her, sharing her pleasure in the unexpected beauty which developed and changed surprisingly, became more assertive, more strikingly characteristic with every mile they traversed, as leaving the green fertility of the Peninsula, and the blue line of the Atlantic, behind, the train plunged into the rugged open country, where the long lush grass was splashed with vivid colour, with the orange and purple and crimson of the wild flowers that struggled amid the tangled growth; where the mountain ranges showed blue in the blue distance, which like an azure veil spread itself over the golden riot of the sunshine.

"I've dwelt in fancy on this often," he said,—“travelling with you,—seeing new places with you. I'm fond of scenery. I like going about. But always I take you with me in imagination. I knew you'd enjoy it. I enjoy it as I never enjoyed before—because of you.”

Pamela did not remove her gaze from the landscape, but she slipped her hand along the ledge of the window until it met his; and for a while they remained in silence, watching the view together.

"I have often had a feeling that some day we should do this journey, you and I," he said presently. "But I didn't suppose it would be under these conditions... God knows what I thought! I've always been a dreamer... I pictured breaking the journey with you. There are one or two places along the line that are well worth a visit. It makes the journey easier. You will be pretty well tired out before we reach Pretoria.”

She nodded.

"Yes," she said. "But we couldn't do that.”

"No; I suppose we can't. That's the pity of it. But it is good as it is," he added, glancing at her with a smile. "We'll make the most of this... Why not? It's the finish. It will be something for me to look back upon anyway, when you are just a memory to me.”

Her face clouded at his words, suggesting in their quiet finality the complete separation which the end of the journey promised. In their frank acknowledgement of their mutual love, both realised that meeting in the future was impossible, at any rate for many years. Perhaps when time had reconciled them to parting they might meet again as friends.

"I have secured a berth for myself in the next compartment," he observed, after a pause. "I've got it to myself. So if you require anything when I am not with you, you have only to knock in to me, and I shall hear. When you want to be alone, just say the word, and I'll dear out.”

Pamela smiled at him gravely. That was just what she did not want—to be alone. His presence was an immense comfort to her. She doubted whether she could have undertaken this difficult journey without him,—have faced, without his support, the still more difficult task which awaited her at the journey's end. He inspired her with confidence and courage. She knew that as long as she needed him he would not fail her,—he would see her through to the finish.

They lunched at a little table together in the dining-car, and afterwards Dare insisted that she should rest for a while; for the day was hot, and the compartment, with all the windows open, was oppressively close. He settled her comfortably, and went out into the corridor to smoke. And Pamela, drowsy with the heat and the motion, fell asleep, and did not wake until nearly four. When she opened her eyes again, Dare was standing in the doorway of the compartment, looking down at her. He smiled as their glances met. Then he came forward and bent and kissed her. She flushed brightly, and sat up.

"By all the rules of the game I ought not to have done that," he said. "But—may I?"

She rose, and put her two hands on his shoulders and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Why not?" she said.

Her hands slipped round his neck until they met behind.

"We are hungry for love, and we are giving up everything. Why should we deny ourselves the bare crumbs? And it will be ended so soon. I don't see any harm in it at all... Do you?"

"No," he said, with his arms about her. "I suppose I view it in much the same way as yourself. But the world wouldn't, you know.”

"Oh, the world!" Pamela pressed closer to him. "We are out of the world, dear, just for this journey. We have left it behind... we're away from it all—alone—you and I. We are going to have this time together,—a glimpse of Heaven to brighten the drab world when we get back to earth. I want to make the most of it—of every minute. I don't want to sleep away the hours, as I did this afternoon. It wasn't kind of you to send me to sleep. Afterwards, when we are back in the world, then I'll sleep, but not now. To-night I shall sit up quite late. I shall keep you with me. We'll watch the night close down upon the veld, and look out upon the moving darkness together, and forget the world entirely and all this weary business of life... My dear! ... Oh, my dear!"

He bent his head lower until their lips met.

The long hot day drew to its close, and the brief twilight descended. They dined as they had lunched at the little table together. There were very few passengers on the train; the seats in the dining-car, save for one or two, were unoccupied. This was due to the season. It was a satisfaction to Dare, as it insured their greater privacy. He had secured their compartments at the end of the corridor so that they should not be disturbed with people passing; each detail had been carefully considered and carried out, and everything that experience had taught him as necessary to the comfort of a long train journey in the hot weather had been provided. Pamela lacked nothing which forethought could devise. Fruit there was in abundance, and cooling drinks suspended from the carriage window in Dare's canvas water-bag. The dry air of the Karroo induces thirst. Pamela, who had come away entirely unprovided, was grateful to him for his thought for her.

"You are a wonderful person; you've forgotten nothing," she said.

"I am an old hand," he replied. "I do not travel with a beautiful trust in Providence, and a blind faith in the commissariat of the railway, like this other wonderful person. To-morrow and the next day you will know what thirst means."

"I think we shall be able to satisfy it," she said, regarding the hamper of fruit on the opposite seat. "It's like a huge picnic, isn't it? I feel—excited."

He laughed, and passed an arm about her, holding her comfortably against his shoulder. She rested so for a while quietly.

"I have drunk of the waters of Lethe," she said, looking up at him after a silence. "I am like a woman whose memory has gone. Everything is a blank, save the present. It's good, isn't it?"

"It's more than good," he replied.

He gazed down into the sweet face resting against his shoulder, and smiled into the deep, serious eyes.

"Tired?" he asked.

"No," she answered.

"We've been travelling over nine hours," he said. "We shall reach Matjesfontein shortly."

"Do we stop there?"

"Only for a minute or two. Then you will see the Karroo at night."

"It's night now," she said. "But it isn't dark."

"It's a clear night," he answered. "It won't get darker than this. See the stars, Pamela?"

She turned to look from the window.

"There is too much light in the carriage," she said, leaning out into the warm dusk, and gazing upon the shadowed landscape which gave an impression of movement, as though it swept past the lighted train.

Dare got up and switched off the light. She turned her head quickly.

"Oh! I didn't know you could do that," she said. "That's much nicer."

He returned and seated himself beside her, and leaned from the broad window with his face close to hers. She touched his cheek with her own caressingly.

"Night on the veld," she whispered,—“and just we two alone—watching. All those other people... they don't count. I love it—don't you? Do you notice the scents? They are stronger than in the daytime. What is it. I can smell as we go along? Something... it's like heliotrope."

"The night convolvulus," he answered. "The veld is smothered with it in places. All the best scents in Africa are night scents. The night is the best time of all."

"Yes; it's the best time," she agreed. "A night like this! ... Isn't it perfect? I am alive as I have never felt before. It's as though all my senses were quickened. I didn't know it was possible to enjoy so intensely. I wish this could last for ever... I wish that I might fall asleep presently, and wake no more... Don't let us talk... Let us watch together—like this,—and just feel..."

And so they remained, this man and woman who loved hopelessly, silent in the darkened carriage, with faces pressed close against each other,—intent on one another to the exclusion of every other thought,—clinging together in a mute sympathy, and a love which had gone beyond utterance, got above and outside ordinary physical passion, and stood for what it was,—the supreme thing in their lives,—the best that life had offered them, which neither separation nor sorrow could filch from their possession.

And the train rushed on through the clear, luminous night that, warm still and fragrant with the hundred different scents of the Karroo, never darkened beyond a twilight duskiness, in which the veld showed darkly defined against the deepening purple of the sky, where a young moon rode like a white sickle amid the countless stars.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Pamela awoke with the sun flashing in her eyes as the heavy lids lifted reluctantly to the flush of the new day. She sat up and looked from the window which had remained open and unshuttered through the night. Dare had left her shortly before two o'clock, and she had slept soundly until roused by the sun, which newly risen shone golden in a cloudless sky. Already its fiery heat penetrated into the carriage, and struck fiercely on her hands and face, and upon the cushions of the seat which felt warm under her touch.

She wondered whether Dare had slept, whether he slept still? Involuntarily her thoughts turned back to the overnight vigil. She reviewed with a regretful sense as of something past, gone irrevocably, the quiet hours of intimate companionship, silent hours for the greater part,—silent with that eloquence of wordlessness more assertive than speech. A raised voice would have sounded intrusive, breaking the stillness of the darkened carriage where they had

sat close together, gazing out upon the dusk, and whispering at intervals the thoughts which sprang straight from the heart to the lips. That night with its beauty; its stirrings of complex emotions, seeking and evading articulate expression; its untellable happiness, made up mainly of physical nearness and assimilated thoughts and feelings, had rolled back into the past,—was curtained off for ever behind the obnubilating folds of yesterday's mantle. Only memory remained; the vivid hours had faded away in the dawn. Would any night ever mean so much to them again?

Pamela rose and made her toilet with the primitive arrangements provided in the carriage. She felt crumpled and unrefreshed, the effects of sleeping fully dressed. There was grit and sand in her hair. She brushed and rearranged it by the aid of the tiny suspended mirror. Then she dusted the compartment as well as she was able with a handkerchief; the fine red sand of the Karroo penetrated everywhere, and lay thick upon the baggage and the cushions of the seats.

She heard Dare moving in the next compartment; and felt glad that he too was up early. When he joined her they would have an early breakfast of fruit and biscuits.

She was ready for him when he tapped on the door. He slid the door back in response to her permission to enter, and came in quietly and kissed her.

"Sleep well?" he asked.

She nodded brightly.

"Like a top," she answered.

"You did it in a hurry then," he remarked. "It's only six now."

"Only six!" she repeated. "And feel how hot it is. What will it be like at noon?"

"If you travel through the Karroo in February," he said, "you must expect to find it sultry. You will have to keep the shutters closed on the sunny side."

"But that shuts out the view," she objected. "I'm just loving this. I never imagined anything so desolate and grand and inspiring."

"It's desolate enough," he admitted, glancing through the window out on the wide scene.

They were in the heart of the Karroo now. The arid sandy soil was sparsely covered with scrub and stunted mimosa bushes, and at intervals low hills sprang unexpectedly to the view, giving the effect of dark excrescences on the flat face of the land. Nothing green was visible; everywhere the eye rested on parched, powdered soil and dry scrub, beneath a brazen sky of hard, relentless blue.

They opened their baskets and broke their fast. Pamela was frankly hungry; the clear light air of the Karroo stimulates the appetite; and this early morning breakfast, with the warm sunlight streaming in through the windows, with the light warm breeze on her face, stirring the hair at her temples, was a new experience. She felt as she had felt on the previous night, alive in every nerve and centre of her being,—alert with the instinct of sheer gladness and joy in life; keenly appreciative of each fresh sensation, each fresh aspect in the constantly changing landscape as it unfolded itself to the view.

The stark barrenness of these vast tracks of no man's land appealed to her senses acutely, stirred the imagination; contrasting sombrely with the greater fertility which occasionally started up amid the desolation, emphasising the sterility of the great plain which nursed these oases in its bare bosom, and supplied them from sources denied itself. Here, where the land was richer, where the rivers, dry at this season, had their beds between wooded banks, were to be seen small isolated groups of native huts, reed thatched, and patched with sacking and pieces of tin; and little naked piccaninnies ran forward to meet the train, and danced and shrieked excitedly, holding out little dark supplicating hands in greedy anticipation. Pamela snatched a handful of fruit and threw it to them, and leaning from the window, watched the eager race of these children of the sun who scampered to get the prize.

"They are just sweet," she said, laughing.

"At a distance, yes," agreed Dare. "They are characteristic of the country anyway—healthy, untrammelled, uncivilised."

He got up and leaned from the window beside her. They had left the fertility behind. The ground became more stony, more strikingly naked. The railway wound in and out among the hills,—brown hills, covered with scrub, and strewn with huge boulders. There was no sight of a tree or of any living thing. The wind blew fitfully and more strongly; hot breaths of it were wafted in their faces, carrying with it a fine red grit which made the eyes sore.

Dare watched the eager, intent face with a slightly amused smile. Pamela's keen enjoyment of everything reduced the discomfort of the long tiring journey to a minimum. She was making of it a picnic, and he was glad to fall in with her mood.

"We will take advantage of the next stop," he said, "and make our way to the breakfast-car. I need something more substantial than fruit to face the day upon."

He was wise in insisting upon a substantial breakfast; the heat, later in the day, deprived them both of appetite. Pamela refused to go to lunch, and Dare, equally disinclined for food, remained with her in the compartment, sitting opposite her on the shady side of the stifling carriage, keenly observant of her as she sat, limp and pale with the heat, but still interested; noting everything with languid, amazed blue eyes while the train rushed onward across the

burning plain, through miles of uncultivated land, vast tracks of sun-drenched, treeless desert, where in patches of startling green, showing vividly amid the blackened scrub, its pale fingers pointing skyward, the milkbush flourished, hardy plant of the dry Karroo, which like the cactus draws its sustenance from the dews. Bleached bones of cattle strewn the ground in places, and about the farms, springing up occasionally out of the barrenness, the lean stock moved listlessly, feeding on the insufficient vegetation.

Farther on, in the dry bed of a river, a few hollow-flanked oxen lay, too weak to rise, their big soft eyes dim with suffering; and on the banks starved sheep were dying on the blackened veld, victims of the merciless drought that had swept the land bare as though devastated by fire. The aasvogels, perched on the telegraph poles along the railway, waited sombrely; grim birds of prey, with their bare ugly necks and gloomy eyes, ready to swoop when the last faint flicker of life died out.

Little whirlpools of dust rose on the flats, small, detached, yellow clouds, disturbed by some local puff of wind; and across the hard blue of the sky a few fleecy clouds floated lazily, throwing moving shadows of dense black upon the kopjes that appeared at frequent and unexpected intervals parallel with the line. Lonely graves of British soldiers, reminiscent of the ugly past, lay thickly at the foot of these deadly hills.

"This," Pamela said, bringing her face round and looking with troubled eyes at Dare, "makes my heart ache. This is truly the Desolate Way. But it's impressive,—it's amazing. I feel all stirred."

"Yes," he said; "one can't help feeling that. It's the actuality of life struggling with death, an everlasting grapple with indeterminate result. One sees here the forces of nature incessantly warring, the elements of productiveness and destruction constantly opposed. One day these elements will be brought into subjection. The railway is the first step in linking up these waste places with our tentative civilisation. This country is in the lap of the future."

"I would sooner see it as it is," she said.

"So would I," he agreed. "Civilisation could never excite one's imagination as this untamed land does. It's a fine country,—worth the sacrifice of a good deal."

"But not worth that," she said, and pointed to the cairns of stones with the little wooden crosses standing above them. There were so many of these relics along the route.

"That's the part that shows," he returned. "It has cost more than that."

She was silent for a while, gazing from the window as she leaned back in her seat. Dare had bought some pineapples at De Aar that the natives were selling on the platform, and he cut one of the fruit in half, and gave it to her with a spoon, that being, he assured her, the only way in which a pineapple should be eaten.

"If I had come alone," Pamela said, "I should have fared badly."

"You couldn't have made this journey alone," he said decidedly. "It's unthinkable."

The wind was rising steadily, a hot wind, that stirred the sticky red sand and carried it in clouds towards them till it covered everything. Whirlpools of red dust, rising skyward like tongues of furiously swirling flame, travelled with extraordinary velocity along the ground. There were farms here too, and cultivated patches of grain, and more lean sheep; and at infrequent intervals, marking a spot of beauty in this sterile waste, grew low, spiky, darkly green bushes starred with white blossom resembling cherry blossom, and straggling clumps of the prickly pear.

"And people live on these lonely farms," Pamela said. "I wonder what their lives are like? Think of it, day after day—only this."

"Fairly dull," Dare commented. "But it's extraordinary how little they regard it. I've stayed on some of these Karroo farms. It isn't half bad."

"As an experience, perhaps not... But to live there!"

"There are conditions," he returned, "in which such isolation might be agreeable."

"They would be quite extraordinary conditions," she rejoined. "Most of those people are probably ordinary folk with ordinary feelings. I can't imagine it myself. It appears to me depressingly monotonous. How tired they must grow of one another."

He looked amused.

"It is possible to attain to that state of boredom even in big centres," he argued.

"Well, yes, of course. But there are distractions. One isn't so entirely dependent on one another."

"That's the strongest argument in favour of these cut off places," he returned. "Such absolute dependence must develop qualities of kindness and toleration which would encourage the companionable spirit. I don't think it would irk me under the right conditions. The heart of the Karroo would be heaven with the right person to share one's life."

"I suppose any exile might be acceptable in that case," Pamela said, gravely returning his look. "But I don't fancy it happens often in life that the right people come together."

"That is sometimes their own fault," he answered quietly. He leaned suddenly towards her, and took and held her hand. "We are in a fair way to commit that blunder, Pamela. We are stumbling forward, following blindly the leading

of a blind fate, and cutting the ground behind us, closing every retreat. I'm gripped with a conviction at times that we are acting foolishly,—that afterwards we shall regret."

"Regret!" she echoed a little bitterly. "Life is one long regret."

"It is in our own hands," he said. "The choice is always ours."

"No," she said, "no!"

She drew her hand gently from his and turned her face aside quickly, afraid to meet the love in his eyes, afraid of the earnest persuasion of his manner as he presented their case anew for her consideration. It was hard to withstand him. But free choice, she realised, was the one thing which was not permitted them; for her it was not a question of choice at all; it was a matter of controlled and unquestionable necessity. If she turned back now it would be to own herself beaten at every point along the road of life. That would insure regret also—more than regret. A shameful consciousness of failure would stultify any satisfaction that love would bring them; and in watching her children grow up about her she would be reminded continually of how completely she had failed in her duty to them. They would be to her always a lasting reproach.

"You are bent on making a hard business of life," he said.

His voice held a dissatisfied ring; his eyes, as they rested on her half-averted face, wore a look of baffled perplexity. It had not been his intention to make this further appeal; he was vexed with himself for troubling her; but at the moment he could not have kept the words back.

"Whatever course I took the path would be difficult," she answered, "because I took the wrong step years ago. One can't go back, you see, and start again. One has to make the best of one's mistakes. That's why we are parting now, dear,—you and I. There isn't any choice in it at all."

He moved to her side of the compartment and sat down close to her.

"I've got to submit to your ruling," he said; "I know that... And I'm doing it, doing it with an ill grace, perhaps; but you can't expect too much. There's just one little ray of comfort left me, Pamela... Shall I tell you what that is?"

She slipped a hand into his.

"Tell me," she said softly.

"It's that I have a presentiment at the back of my mind that one day in the future—how far off or how near, I cannot say—we shall come together—be together always. I don't feel that we are parting. We aren't parting—not finally. This is an ugly phase in our intercourse—a rude breaking away of vital things that entails a certain loss—temporary loss. Afterwards we shall meet again, farther along the journey. Then we'll finish the journey together."

She made no answer. She turned to him in silence, and drew his face to hers and kissed him with grave tenderness upon the mouth. After that they did not talk again for some considerable time.

Chapter Thirty.

Night! ... night on the veld once more—another luminous night of stars and sweet scents, and the haunting sense of mystery and isolation and intimate companionship, interrupted at intervals of ever greater frequency as the train ran into some wayside station, and hurrying forms moved along the platform, and gazed with faint curiosity into the unlighted carriage, as they passed the open windows and caught a momentary glimpse of the dim faces of a man and woman watching together in the night.

"Ghosts!" Pamela said once, pressing closer against Dare. "Shadows of the night,—flitting in the darkness, and swallowed up in it again. I wonder what they make of us, those ghosts?—two live people alone in a shadow world."

She shivered slightly as the train sped onward again. Dare took a wrap from the seat and placed it about her shoulders. The temperature had fallen perceptibly. The fierce heat of the day was succeeded by the cold of the Transvaal night,—the cold of a high bracing altitude, following with surprising suddenness on the dry, burning heat of the Karroo. The fierceness and the desolation lay behind. The country presented here a fertile wooded beauty, startling in its greenness, following upon the arid desert through which they had passed.

"Don't leave me to-night," Pamela said presently, gripping his hand tightly. "Stay, and let us see it out together. It's the finish... our last night. To-morrow..."

"There is no to-morrow," he interposed quickly. "We have no concern with anything but the present I'll stay... I want to stay. Lean against me, and sleep if you feel like it. I'd like you to sleep, Pamela."

She laughed softly.

"I don't want to lose one precious moment in sleep," she said. "Now talk to me."

"Last night," he reminded her, "you didn't want to talk."

"I know. But to-night it's different. There is so little time left. We have got to crowd everything into to-night. I want a store of memories,—a little harvest of summer thoughts to draw upon when the winter comes. We've talked so little."

"We've managed to express a lot without words," he said.

"Yes," she said... "feelings. We've expressed ourselves somehow mutely. We get near to one another mentally. When I can't see you any more I shall still have that sense of nearness. You'll be there—somewhere."

The arm with which he supported her held her more closely. He looked down at the shadowy outline of her face in the darkness where it rested against his shoulder, and his lips tightened suddenly. Why, in the name of all that was absurd, were they parting like this? ... parting without a sufficient reason,—for a scruple. The impulse to plead with her once more, to urge her more insistently than he had yet done, moved him strongly. He bent his face to hers quickly; but the words he would have uttered died on his lips, as the soft, low-pitched voice that he loved fell again on the silence, with a new note of tenderness in its tone.

"I think it is because of the trust you inspire that I love you so well."

When we perceive, or imagine we perceive, certain qualities in another, it is possible to inspire those qualities which we admire. As he listened to her, Dare was silent; the impulse to plead with her faded. To deliberately shake her faith in him was a thing he could not do. There must be no painful memories of those last hours together.

"There is no accounting for love,—love like ours," he said after a brief pause. "It's not a thing of reasons,—it's instinctive,—a common bond of sympathy, of mental understanding, uniting us as no law could unite us. If we never meet again you will still belong to me, as I belong to you. No lesser love could ever come into my life,—it wouldn't satisfy me. I've given you everything. You fill all the crevices of my heart and brain. You've succeeded in crowding out the rest. When we have gone our separate ways, following out our different lives, as we shall be doing shortly, it will be some consolation to reflect that we hold one another constantly in our thoughts. You'll write to me,—you can't refuse me this time. I shall write,—often, whenever the impulse moves me. I am not going to lose touch with you again. If life gets too difficult for you, you will let me know. I'm always behind you, remember. I'm there when you want me. The time may come, Pamela."

"Yes," she said. "But you mustn't encourage me to become too dependent on you. I'm not going to be afraid of difficulties, dear. Life *is* difficult. It has been difficult for me for some while past. You know... You knew that time you stayed with Connie. I think it was at that time when things were so hard I first learnt how much I cared,—how much you were to me I leaned on your strength then without realising it; and when you left I missed you so. It hurt—like hunger."

"It's like that with me always," he said.

"It is easier to bear now," she added, "since we've talked it over together. It is keeping it all pent up that frets one so. It is wrong,—don't you think?—to be afraid of loving,—to attempt to suppress it as though it were something shameful. There is nothing shameful in love when one loves straight. I'm proud of loving you,—proud to know your love is mine. It's an immense help to me, that knowledge. The world wouldn't see it as we see it. I know. That's where the need for secrecy comes in. But secrecy is just a little—dishonouring, don't you think?"

He smiled faintly.

"The world is old in experience," he said. "We couldn't go on meeting and stay at this point, my dear. Love between man and woman, however steady and restrained, has its element of passion. There must come moments when one's feelings get out of hand. The demand of love increases. You have only just accustomed yourself to the idea of loving; when one grows familiar with the idea one has to explore further. That is why I am going out of your life, dear one, until I can enter into it fully. For you and for me there can be no half measures."

She was silent for a while, a little troubled at the flood of light he had let in upon the situation which she had been viewing through the haze of an impossible idealism. She realised the truth of what he said; and she felt suddenly ashamed, not at his having stripped away the sham coverings ruthlessly, but for having wilfully blinded herself to obvious realities. She felt that she had been convicted of deliberate dishonesty of thought. If he saw this thing clearly, why had not she also seen it without the need of his pointing it out?

"We are lovers, dear; we've admitted that," he resumed. "We can't stop at that unless we give up seeing one another. I want you. You are free to come to me,—free, that is, save for your own scruples. That is why I feel that in making love to you I have not acted dishonourably. I've fought for our love,—it was a square fight, and I've lost. You may be right... I can't say. Anyway the decision rests with you. I'm not going against it. I am going to remain in the background until your need of me is as great as my need of you; then you'll send for me. In the meantime you need not be afraid to trust me. I shall never seek to persuade you against your will."

There was a further silence. Pamela dared not venture upon speech because of the tears which would have choked her utterance had she attempted to express her feelings aloud. He was so much more honest than she was, so much finer and stronger. She held him in her thoughts so highly placed that Dare would have been amazed and considerably embarrassed could he have realised the pinnacle to which he was elevated in the opinion of this woman, whom he was conscious of looking up to as infinitely better and simpler and altogether nobler of intention than himself. Compared with her direct and decent conceptions of life, her quiet acceptance of duty, and sense of responsibility, his ideas appeared carnal and extraordinarily limited and self-centred. He did not want to give up anything. He rebelled at the sacrifice demanded of him. It was only because he recognised the impossibility of shaking her resolution that he submitted at all. Had she weakened for a single moment he would have set himself to wear down her resistance with the first sign of faltering on her part. He had watched jealously for some sign of her yielding from the hour when they were alone together, away from the influences that had surrounded her in her home. During the past two days of intimacy and close companionship his hopes had run high. He did not understand how, loving him as she did, and admitting her love so freely, she could yet persist in her determination to marry the man who had wronged her so grievously. It was beyond his powers of comprehension entirely. The day would come,

he believed, when she would recognise her mistake, would possibly even acknowledge it. It was for that day he would wait. When it dawned, as dawn it surely must, he would be ready.

The night grew colder as it advanced. Dare unstrapped the rugs and wrapped them about their knees. Pamela was enveloped in his overcoat, with nothing of herself visible but the dim outline of her face showing above the collar, crowned by the pale masses of her hair. She felt wonderfully comfortable and wakeful.

This rushing through the windy starlight, through unfamiliar country shrouded in the dusk and mystery of night, darkly revealed in silhouette against the lighter sky, exhilarated her, filled her with a sense of beauty and ever deepening wonder, as mile after mile was passed in the noisy rush of that symbol of modern activity through the heart of a partially developed country. Black objects, shapes of trees and outlines of scattered homesteads, started up out of the surrounding obscurity, flashed darkly for a second on the landscape, and vanished, and were succeeded by other shapes, formless, vaguely distinct outlines, distorted and magnified in the gloom. The quiet remote beauty of night lay like a softening shadow upon the face of the land.

"I have always loved the night," Pamela said, speaking softly as though wishful to avoid disturbing the tranquillity by raising her tones; "but I have never loved it so well before, felt so at one with it. It shuts out the world, doesn't it? ... shuts out everything."

"It's you in the night I love," he said. "That's where the magic for me comes in. If I hadn't you beside me I should probably be sleeping. Place and time don't count, Pamela,—it's companionship that matters. See the dawn, dear,—just breaking. In a short while it will be light."

"Yes."

She stirred restlessly. The thought of what the new day held for her troubled her insistently, filled her with a shrinking sensation of dread. Before another dawn should break she would be faced with gigantic issues; the biggest crisis of her life would have been met. What did the future hold for her, she wondered. Had it lain in her power to lift the veil she would not have dared to look.

"I'm dreading the day, dear," she said, a little tremulously. "I'm such a coward... I'm afraid,—of him."

"He's a sick man, Pamela," he said, desirous of reassuring her. "Illness changes a man."

"I know," she said.

She was quiet for a while, watching the paling stars in the slowly brightening heavens, observant of the gradual definement of the landscape, as the light revealed it, first as a clear colourless picture in the grey dawn, and later as a wonder of separate distinct shades of green and amber beneath a sky already flushing with the promise of the day.

He tried to distract her thoughts by speaking on impersonal topics, by bringing the talk back again after a while to themselves. He did not speak of love. That was all past and done with. He assumed a new attitude, was quietly protective and helpful and reassuring. He drew up her plans for her, and settled where they would stay. It was Pamela's wish that they should go to the same hotel. He had suggested separate hotels; but he gave in to her pleading. After all what did it matter? He was there to advise and help her; it was better that he should be at hand.

"I am leaving everything to you," she said, regarding him wistfully.

"Of course," he answered. "That's what I'm here for."

"There's one thing,"—she paused, then completed the sentence—"I want you to do, if you don't mind... It's been troubling me. Would you tell the doctor,—what you think necessary to make him understand? I shouldn't know how to explain..."

He smiled down into the distressed blue eyes, and laid his hand warmly upon hers.

"I never intended you should explain," he answered. "That's my job too."

Chapter Thirty One.

They reached Pretoria shortly after nine. Dare drove with Pamela to the Grand Hotel where he engaged rooms. They breakfasted together at a small table in the public room. A rather silent meal it proved; Pamela was tired, and somewhat depressed now that they were arrived at their destination; the fatigue of the long journey told upon her; and her eyes were heavy, the result of insufficient rest.

All the glamour was ended; the pleasurable excitement, the sense of adventure, of happy forgetfulness, was as a dream of the night which the daylight dispelled utterly, leaving only a vague regret of glowing memories dimly recalled and greatly missed. She *felt* as a woman might feel who had been pleasantly drugged and wakes painfully in a bleak, unlovely world.

Dare prescribed a warm bath and bed. She could do nothing that morning. He would see her again at the lunch hour, when she was rested, and tell her what arrangements he had been able to make in the interval.

She acquiesced silently, too weary and depressed to care whether she saw Arnott that day or the next. Now that the meeting loomed so imminent all her courage was oozing away. She realised with a sense of horror at herself that she shrank almost with repulsion from the thought of standing beside the sick bed of the man she once had loved, for

whom she now felt nothing but a cold resentment, a bitter anger for the evil part he had played in her life. She did not desire to see him. But the reason which had led her to him governed her still. Her future course was none the less plain because it was difficult to follow.

The much needed rest brought with its refreshment a greater tranquillity of mind; and when she met Dare at luncheon she was herself again, quiet and composed, a little nervous obviously, but equal to facing the ordeal when the moment for doing so arrived.

She was relieved to hear that she was not expected to visit the invalid until the following morning. She might not, Dare informed her, see him even then. It depended entirely upon how he received the news of her presence whether she was admitted to his room. He was making good progress, and the doctors had no wish to retard his recovery by risking the excitement of an emotional scene.

"I have vouched for your absolute discretion," he said, meeting the wistful eyes with a reassuring smile. "I don't fancy you are the sort of woman who indulges in scenes."

"No," she said quietly. "I've got beyond that." She lowered her gaze to the flowers in the centre of the table, contemplating their beauty with a kind of tired relief. Dare watched her intently.

"I feel," she added after a pause, "rather as though I had become frozen. I don't seem to care much what happens. You'll go with me in the morning, I suppose?"

"Naturally," he answered.

She raised her eyes again to his swiftly.

"After I have seen him once," she said, "it won't be so difficult. I'll be able to release you then from your kind office. You mustn't waste your time any longer on my account."

"I don't reckon it time wasted," he returned.

"Not wasted,—no. I couldn't have managed without you. But I feel it is very selfish of me to have accepted so much from you. You've set me in the path. I'll be able to walk it now unaided."

"We will talk of that," he said easily, "after you have seen him. In the meantime I am not going to let you dwell on the matter. You are going to drive with me this afternoon. It's beautiful country about here, and the roads are excellent. We'll forget the painful purpose of this journey, Pamela, and enjoy ourselves. I claim that as my fee for the services you insist on recognising."

"You are so good to me," she said.

Her voice was low and tenderly tremulous, and her eyes, lifted to his, shone misty and soft and confiding. Dare gripped the table with both hands, and stared back at her across the flowers which divided them in their slender crystal vase. His face was tense.

"It is easy to be that," he answered gruffly, oblivious of the people in the room, oblivious of everything but the sweet, tired beauty of her face, and the trustful affection in the earnest eyes.

"I say," he added, recollecting himself, "let's get out of this."

She rose; and he followed her from the room, aware of the glances she attracted in passing, and not indifferent to the covert looks directed at himself. He was well known in Pretoria; one or two faces there were not unfamiliar to him. He heard his name pronounced distinctly as he passed through the doors in Pamela's wake. It might be well after all, he decided, to leave her as she suggested on the morrow. It was difficult to have continually in mind the necessity for playing the discreet part of disinterested friend under observant eyes. He had not intended to leave so soon; but in the circumstances it was wiser; and from Johannesburg he would have only a two hours' journey if the necessity for his presence arose. He would extract a promise from her to wire to him if she found herself in any difficulty.

He did not unfold his plans to her then. He decided to leave matters as they stood until the morrow. So much depended on the result of the morning's interview. It seemed to him that his own fate, being inseparable from hers, hung in the balance of the next twenty-four hours.

He felt almost as nervous as Pamela the following day, when he accompanied her to the Home, and waited in the little room where he had waited before to learn the doctor's verdict.

The matron came in and talked hopefully with Pamela of her husband's progress. Mr Arnott had been informed that his wife was there, and had expressed the wish to see her. She thought that very possibly the visit would cheer him; he had shown a growing tendency towards depression of late, which was not unusual in the early stages of convalescence.

Pamela listened very quietly to the amiable chatter of this pleasant, capable looking woman, whose clear eyes were curiously observant of the white-faced stranger, so tardy in her duty to her sick husband, so little concerned, it seemed to her, about his condition now that she was here. The doctor had let fall some vague intimation of domestic estrangement in instructing her as to the precautions necessary to take in regard to this visit; but in view of the man's serious illness the other woman looked on the wife's unforgiving attitude as heartless in the extreme. She did not know of the agony of suspense hidden behind the quiet manner, the fear which the calm eyes concealed. She noticed only the stranger's wonderful composure, the utter lack of spontaneous inquiry into her husband's case. The only questions that were asked were put by the man who accompanied her, and who appeared more interested in

the patient, if not more sympathetic, than the wife.

When the doctor entered the matron withdrew; and the medical man, an older man than the junior partner whom Dare had interviewed on his first visit, drew a chair forward and sat down opposite to Pamela.

He scrutinised her intently, with kindly interested gaze, thinking her over in the light of the information he had received from Dare on the previous day, which, meagre as it had been, had conveyed the impression that the wife was much to be pitied. Dare's version had explained the young woman whose connection with Arnott had puzzled the doctor when first called upon to attend this case. Confronted with Pamela, he found the situation difficult of comprehension.

"You must be prepared," he warned her, "for a terrible change in your husband. He's been very ill—he is very ill still. But his recovery is more satisfactory than we had hoped for. You must be very careful not to excite him."

"Yes," said Pamela gravely; and he felt that the warning was unnecessary.

"He is expecting you," he added. "I believe he is anxious to see you. It is quite possible that this illness of his has wiped a good deal of the near past from his memory. I would advise you not to recall anything of a painful nature. Approach him if possible only on present matters. And cheer him up a little. You can possibly do more for him than I can at this stage."

Pamela smiled at him bravely.

"I have come with the intention of doing all that is in my power," she answered gently. "If he will let me, I will devote myself to him. I want to help him—if I can."

"I don't think there should be any difficulty about that," he replied. "For a while you will have to be satisfied to leave him here. Later, if you wish, he can be moved to where you are staying. He could not undertake the journey to Cape Town yet."

"No?" Pamela said, thinking abruptly of Connie and the children. "I had thought—"

"Too great a risk," he said decidedly. "We'll err on the side of caution, Mrs Arnott. He is making such a splendid recovery, I should be sorry if we did anything to retard it now. I think you will have to make up your mind to remain in Pretoria for a time. I will let you know as soon as I consider it safe for him to travel. In any case the hot weather would prohibit a long journey. Didn't you find it very trying coming up?"

"I don't think I mind the heat very much," she answered, evading a more direct reply.

"That's fortunate," he returned, smiling, "because there is no getting away from it out here." He rose. "Now, if you are ready, I will direct you to Mr Arnott's room."

He glanced at Dare.

"You'll remain here?" he said.

Dare nodded. Under his brows he was observing Pamela, who, with the old nervous light in her eyes, was waiting near the door. She did not look at him as she passed out. In silence she accompanied the doctor along the passage to Arnott's room which was situated at the end of it. The door stood open, and a nurse who was standing inside came forth, and took up her position in the passage within call in case she were needed. The doctor motioned to Pamela to enter.

"I've brought Mrs Arnott to see you," he said.

His words broke the dead stillness that reigned in the room abruptly; but as soon as he had uttered them and quietly withdrawn, the stillness descended again, more deadly, more paralysing than before, it seemed to Pamela, left alone for the first time with the man who when last she had seen him had flung out of her presence in anger, and who now, moving his head feebly on the pillow, turned a pallid, eager, so old face towards her, and held out his hand to her, and broke into pitiful crying.

Pamela felt inexpressibly shocked. She had prepared herself for a change, but not so great a change as this. His hair had whitened during his illness; it was quite white, like a very old man's; his chin was unshaven, and the unfamiliar beard was white also; his moustache alone retained a few dark hairs. His face was thin, and so altered that, but for the eyes, she would have failed in recognising it. And the sight of him lying there, weak and helpless and so feebly crying, hurt her beyond measure, moved her to an almost terrified compassion, so that for a second she could not stir or speak. Something seemed to clutch at her heart and stop its beating. She had never seen Arnott cry before. The thought of tears in connection with him would have occurred to her as impossible. And here he lay,—crying,—holding out a trembling hand to her, and sobbing like a child.

With a swift, sudden movement, as though her limbs relaxed abruptly and responded automatically to the rush of pity that leapt up within her, submerging for the time all other feeling, she approached the bed and knelt beside it and put her arms about him, as she might have put them about a suffering child, appealing for sympathy. She drew his head to her shoulder, and with the so sadly altered face hidden from her sight against her breast, felt her courage returning, and was able to articulate his name, and murmur soothing words to him as she caressed the silvered hair.

"Herbert!—my dear," she said; "it's Pamela. It's all right, dear... Don't cry... don't cry."

"I've been ill," he said, speaking thickly, with a slight impediment that made the words difficult to understand. "I've

wanted you, Pam... You've been a long time coming."

He spoke querulously, and sobbed again with a sort of complaining self-pity, as though he felt she had been neglectful, that she ought to have known and come to him before. Pamela would have realised without the doctor's preparation that the enfeebled mind had lost its power to remember recent events. It was quite possible that he did not realise even where he was, that, had he been told, he would have failed to recall the circumstances of his coming to Pretoria. The subject of their differences, of his desertion of her, had faded entirely from his recollection. He only knew that he was ill, that he had wanted her, and that she had been long in coming. He took up his complaint again.

"I've wanted you," he reiterated. "I've kept on wanting you. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I came as soon as I could," she answered soothingly. "They would not let me see you before. You've been very ill. You are getting better now. Soon you will be much stronger, and then we will go home."

He lay still for a second or so, taking in the significance of her words.

"Home!" he repeated vaguely... "Yes."

He drew in his breath quiveringly like a tired child, and lay back on the pillow and stared at her with the familiar eyes set in the unfamiliar face. Pamela felt oddly disconcerted by his gaze, and only with difficulty forced herself to meet it. She wished that he would not look at her, wished that he had remained with his face hidden against her breast.

"I should like to go home," he said.

He spoke with a puzzled intonation as though not quite dear in his mind as to where home was; but very sure of one thing, that home meant being with Pamela, and that he wanted to be with her.

"You'll stay with me?" he asked presently.

"I will come and see you often," she answered, "every day. I have come to be with you. As soon as you are able to be moved I will take you away. You must make haste and get strong."

"Yes," he said, "get strong. I have had funny dreams," he added, still keeping his eyes on her face. "I get funny dreams now occasionally,—when I'm awake. That's strange, isn't it? Why do I dream when I am awake?"

"That is only weakness," she replied gently. "Now I am here you won't dream any more."

"No," he said, and seemed satisfied with her reply. "I've thought sometimes you were dead," he said; "but you aren't." He stroked her hand softly. "I'm glad you're all right, Pam."

His eyes, still puzzled, still striving vainly to recall facts which seemed to hover on the borderland of memory, and which always eluded him, wandered from her face, wandered aimlessly about the room, and came back to her face again with the same perplexed, inquiring look which was so difficult to meet. She felt that she wanted to push away the hand that so loosely held hers, wanted to get upon her feet and rush from the room,—away from the haunting sight of the grey, drawn face, and the insistent, puzzled eyes,—away from the presence of this man who seemed like a stranger to her, between whom and herself there yet existed an ugly and dishonouring bond.

She controlled herself with a great effort and continued talking soothingly to him, obeying mechanically the will power that had governed her actions throughout. But how much the effort cost her, only she, herself, could ever realise. While she stayed there with him, listening to his thick, disconnected utterances, and replying with a gentleness born of pity only, it seemed to her that something within her, something that was vital and necessary to the appreciation of life, died utterly, and left her apathetic and indifferent, a woman denuded of all the best warm impulses of the heart. The best of herself was dead; there only remained the dull, unloving semblance of her former self.

Chapter Thirty Two.

On leaving Arnott's room, when comforted by her presence he fell asleep and so freed her from the painful necessity of remaining beside him, Pamela returned swiftly to the waiting-room, where Dare was, and, entering, closed the door behind her, and stood leaning against it, with her hand on the knob, as though fearful that if she released it some one might intrude upon them, might perhaps induce her to return to the room from which, as soon as she had seen he slept, she had fled in cautious haste. Her face was flushed, her eyes were bright and hard, and her breath came with painful quickness, in short, spasmodic gasps.

Dare looked at her in some concern, and advancing, stood close to her, and laid his hand upon her sleeve.

"Don't excite yourself," he said. "Sit down, Pamela. There's no hurry. Get a grip on yourself."

She laughed shrilly. And the next moment she was crying, holding to his arm, and weeping on his shoulder.

"I'm a fool," she sobbed, "a fool... I don't know why I'm crying. Please, don't take any notice of me. I'll be all right in a minute."

"Oh! my dear," she cried presently, raising her face, and looking up at him through tear-blurred eyes, "you can't imagine... He's an old man, and childish. He doesn't seem to remember—anything. He was just glad to see me... And all the time I was only conscious of an eagerness, a horrible eagerness, to get away,—to run from the room. If it's going to be like that always—"

"It won't," he interposed quietly. "You've had a shock, I wish now I had persuaded you not to come. Sit down, Pamela. Shall I ask for anything for you?"

"No," she said, "I don't want any one to come in here. I'm all unnerved. I don't know how I am going through with this."

"Then don't go through with it," he said. "Chuck it. It's not too late now."

He led her to a chair and put her into it.

"What's the use of making yourself miserable, like this?" he said.

She looked at him in consternation, as he stood over her and made this astounding suggestion in the quiet ordinary tones of a man offering quite simple, commonplace advice. He met her gaze steadily.

"You've tried," he said. "It's not your fault if the job is too big for your undertaking. I've felt all along that you didn't appreciate fully the difficulty of the task. Give in, Pamela, and admit yourself beaten."

"Give in *now*?" she cried.

"Why not?" he said.

She leaned back in the chair, her face paling; and for a second or so neither spoke. Dare remained waiting with a certain confidence for her answer. It occurred to him that she knew herself to be beaten. All the fight was gone out of her. She had the air of a creature trapped and frantically seeking a way of escape. If he pointed the way in all probability she would take it.

What decision she came to, or if she came to any decision, he had no means then of knowing. While he waited for her to speak the door of the room opened, and the matron appeared, and stood on the threshold, surveying the scene with manifest surprise. Dare glanced over his shoulder at her, but he did not move.

"Mrs Arnott is feeling a little upset," he said.

She came forward quickly.

"Shall I fetch anything?—water?"

"I don't think that is necessary," he replied. And Pamela sat up with a quickly uttered protest.

"It is nothing," she said. "Just shock. I wasn't prepared to see such a change. I've never seen any one ill,—really ill, like that, before. I'm all right now. It was stupid of me to be so foolish. But," she looked at the matron piteously, with quivering lips, "he is so altered," she said pathetically. "He is quite old."

The matron felt puzzled. In her long experience of sickness she had never known the patient's appearance to be the chief concern of the relatives. She felt a little unsympathetic towards Mrs Arnott's attitude.

"An illness like Mr Arnott's would change any one," she answered. "The difference will be less marked as he gains strength. Your visit seems to have done him good already. He is sleeping quite quietly and comfortably."

"I am glad," Pamela said simply.

She rose and turned appealingly to Dare.

"Shall we go now?"

"If you are ready," he said.

The matron held the door open.

"You are quite sure?" she asked, as she shook hands, and looked searchingly into the frightened blue eyes of this surprising visitor, "that you won't have something before you leave?"

"Quite sure, thank you," Pamela summoned a wintry smile to her aid. "I am sorry to have given so much trouble," she added. "I won't be so foolish again."

The matron repudiated the suggestion of trouble, and inquired if she was to expect the visitor on the morrow. Pamela hesitated for a barely perceptible moment, during which Dare looked as though he would have suggested the wisdom of refraining from making a definite arrangement. He did not, however, speak; and Pamela answered reluctantly, after a pause:

"To-morrow... Yes, I will come to-morrow."

Out in the open air again, driving bade to their hotel, Dare asked her why she had made the arrangement.

"There wasn't any need," he said. "You might not feel up to it. Besides, there's the point to be settled first. If you are going to draw back it has to be now."

"I can't draw back," she answered nervously... "I can't."

"Can you go through with it?" he asked. "That's the question. To draw back is quite ample. In my opinion, it is what you ought to do. Your heart isn't in this, Pamela."

"No," she admitted.

She frowned faintly.

"Before I came my one fear was that he would be difficult; now that I find him wanting me I'm holding back. It's paltry of me. I think if I had come alone I should have found it easier."

"You mean," he said, "that I am trying to influence you?"

"Not trying... I mean that your presence influences me. It makes me hate the thought of living with him. There is no love in my heart for him—not any. When I saw him lying there so ill, so terribly altered, I didn't want to go near him,—didn't want to touch him. It was horrible. I had to force myself to touch him. That is how it will be, I suppose, always. It wasn't the sight of him so much as that thought which so unnerved me. And that woman thinks me an unfeeling brute. Dear heaven! if she only knew!"

"Look here!" he said. "I can't stand this. If you feel all that about it you have no right to go on. It's no fairer on him than on you. It's no kindness to him."

"I am not acting from any motive of kindness towards him," she answered. "I'm paying the debt—and making him pay—which we owe to the children we brought into the world. That is my only reason for going on with this. I can't draw back. I wish I could—even now."

The motor stopped before the hotel entrance. Dare got out and helped her to descend.

"I'm coming up to the balcony," he said. "I want to talk."

Pamela went inside and passed up the stairs to her room. She took off her hat and gloves, and went out on to the balcony, and sat in the shade, waiting for him. He was not long in joining her. He drew a chair up close to hers and sat down.

"Now," he said, "we'll dispose of this matter finally. My time is short. I intend to take the evening train to Johannesburg, unless, of course, you change your mind; and then—"

"You'll take the evening train, dear," she said quietly.

He glanced at her sharply.

"You mean that?" he said. "That's your final answer, Pamela?"

"Yes; that's my final answer."

"So be it," he replied, and looked away again, out across the busy, sunny street.

"It doesn't alter anything," he added presently, speaking in sharp, crisp tones that disguised whatever emotion swayed him at the moment. "Matters stand between us as they were. When you find life too hard, you'll send for me. I shall be able to judge from the tone of your letters how things go with you. In the meantime—save for one occasion—we shall not meet again."

Pamela drew a deep breath, and for a time sat very still, her white face tense and miserable, her eyes staring blankly into space. In her mind, like a refrain, his words were repeating themselves again and again, conveying, somehow, little sense of meaning:

"In the meantime—save for one occasion—we shall not meet again."

Abruptly their full significance broke upon her. She turned to him quickly.

"What occasion?" she asked.

Dare sat back in his seat, contemplating her gravely.

"I've been thinking," he said, "all the way coming up, and again this morning, about the girl—Blanche Maitland. We haven't finished with her," he added, noting Pamela's startled look. "Of course if you had decided differently, that would have been a matter we need not have concerned ourselves with. As things are, however, we have got to put it beyond her power to do you any injury. There is only one way that I can see to prevent that. Your marriage must take place as soon as possible."

"But," Pamela began, and paused dismayed... "I couldn't bear—"

"No," he interposed quickly. "I know what you are feeling. We'll manage it as secretly as possible. It may be necessary to move him from that place. I think it will be necessary. We'll need to take the doctor into our confidence—to a certain extent. We'll suppress the former marriage altogether, I think."

"Oh!" she said, and covered her eyes with her hand, and remained quiet.

He watched her keenly.

"If you leave it to me," he said, "I think I can manage it so that you won't find it very humiliating. Then, if the girl turns up, you are better prepared to face her. I fancy there won't be much difficulty in squaring her. She isn't out for revenge."

He leaned forward and laid a hand warmly upon hers.

"Is it too much altogether to face, dear?" he asked. "I think it will be best for you... God knows, I don't wish you to do it! I'd rather a thousand times you followed my suggestion. If you won't do that, then the other course it seems to me is the only means of safeguarding your position. After all, it is merely hastening things a bit. You always intended legalising the marriage."

"Yes," she said, and was silent, thinking. "I know you are right," she added after reflection. "I'll do whatever you think wise. But I feel that I ought not to let you undertake this too. I am fairly heavily in your debt already; and there is no return that I can make."

Dare smiled at her.

"There is no question of debt or gratitude between us," he replied. "I promised to see you through. I am going to do that. Afterwards..."

The sound of the luncheon gong filled in the pause. Dare got up, without completing the sentence, and putting his hand within her arm walked with her through her room into the corridor.

"I have to go out after lunch," he said. Though he did not explain his reason for going, she felt that it was about her business. "I shall probably only get back in time to fetch my suit case, and say good-bye. I wonder—will you be on the balcony, so that I shall be able to find you?"

"I'll be there," she answered, "in the same place, outside my room."

And so, with the imminent prospect of coming separation hanging over them, they went into luncheon together, and loitered over the meal, talking fragmentally, as people do who have discussed everything of vital interest and have come down to the bedrock of commonplace things.

"You'll wire me," he said once, returning to the subject occupying both their minds, "if you find yourself in any doubt or difficulty? It's nothing of a journey between this and Johannesburg."

She promised; and Dare, satisfied on this point, went on with his meal Pamela could not eat. She trifled with the food which the waiter put on her plate, and watched Dare, thinking of the many meals she would take in that room without him; thinking of the lonely hours she would spend, missing his companionship, missing him,—the lonely years, when the only link between them would be the chain of letters she had promised to interchange... those, and memory.

The future loomed so bleak and empty that she was afraid to look forward. Always she pictured herself shrinking, shrinking ever from the pathetic sight of suffering,—from the shadow of the man that had been, and the duty that would tie her continually to his side. Pamela had yet to learn that there is no path, upon the fingerpost of which Duty is clearly inscribed, so difficult for the traveller's reluctant steps but that beauty is to be met along the road, and peace waits at the finish.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Many emotions stirred Pamela while she waited through the sunny warmth of the summer day for Dare's return. The horror of the morning had passed. She was quite collected now, and able to dwell dispassionately on the changed life that confronted her.

Dare had told her, and she had inclined to believe him, that only love mattered. Now, while she sat alone, thinking quietly, and reviewing all her past life as it stood in relation to the future, she realised that love is not the principal factor in life; it is merely a beautiful adornment, a quality which tends to gladden, and sometimes to ennoble, life; but it is not the base on which the structure is supported. Love is a separate emotion, a distinctly personal attribute. Of itself it is frankly selfish. Only when it teaches self-abnegation can it be termed a wholly beautiful thing. To sacrifice everything for love, is to lower love to a purely physical emotion; and love stripped of its spiritual element becomes an ephemeral passion, a thing of mean delights, an excitement, a quality shorn of all fineness and dragged down to the commonplace of physical necessity. That was the quality of the love she had known in her married life; and that was why to-day, when she needed the strength of love to support her, nothing of it remained but the gaunt spectre of a long dead passion.

But to love warmly and intensely, in a quite human fashion—and to part! ... That was not easy. It made a greater demand on her fortitude than anything she had yet been faced with. But difficulties met courageously present the weapons for their own defeat. The power of conquest comes of the determination to conquer.

When Dare returned, and came up to the balcony in search of her, he discovered her, as he believed, asleep. She was sitting so still, with closed eyes, and was so deeply plunged in thought that she did not hear him until he was close upon her. Then her eyelids flashed open abruptly, and a flush suffused the pallor of her cheeks.

"I've only got a minute," he said, pausing in front of her. "The taxi is waiting. Come inside, Pamela. We can't part here."

She was seated outside the windows of her room, and she rose as he spoke and entered the room without answering him. He followed her quickly.

"I've been seeing to things," he said. "I'll write you. There isn't time to go into it now. But it will be all right. Don't bother your head about anything until you hear from me." He held her by the shoulders and looked steadily into her eyes. "It won't be long before I'm back. But this is our real parting. This is the last time I shall hold you so,—the last time I shall kiss your lips... my dear!"

She drew near to him. Her face as she lifted it to his was transfigured. Never had he seen it so beautiful, so gravely tender. A yearning light of love lit her eyes, made them melting and wondrously soft. For a moment they remained looking at one another. Then he gathered her close in his arms, crushed her to him, and kissed her mouth again and again.

"We're parting," he muttered, drawing back his head, and staring at her without releasing her. "I don't feel I can go somehow. I feel I'm a fool to go. Why don't I stay and fight it out with you, Pamela? You little woman, the strength that is in you! You don't answer. Your eyes just tell me I must go. Well, I am taking part of you away with me—and leaving the best of myself with you... We'll go on... We'll get used to it in time, I daresay. But it hurts, Pamela."

"Yes." She touched his cheek softly with her hand. "These last few days," she said, "they're something to remember..."

"Something," he said, "yes."

"We've been very close," she whispered. "Nothing—no bodily separation can alter that. The memory of your love will remain with me always. I'm glad we've talked of love, dear,—that we haven't tried to hide things from each other."

"Oh! we've talked," he said. "But talking..."

He broke off, and caught her to him again. Then he held her a little way off, and scrutinised her long and earnestly.

"I don't understand," he muttered...

Suddenly his face softened. He bent his head and kissed her again quietly, and, releasing her, turned away.

"Good-bye," he said, a little abruptly, and opened the door of the room and stepped into the corridor.

Pamela remained standing where he had left her, her arms hanging loosely at her sides, her face strained and curiously set; and in her eyes, glowing darkly in the white face, a shadowed look of suffering too deep for utterance or the relief of tears.

When we stand at the parting of the ways how difficult seems the road, how bitter the moment of farewell. But sorrow is no longer enduring than any other emotion. We take our lives again, and go on.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Some years later Dare sat in his room before an untidy desk with a letter spread out before him among the litter of papers and things lying about. The letter was from Pamela, between whom and himself, since the occasion when he had been present at her marriage in Pretoria, these regular but infrequent communications formed the sole link.

This letter in its quiet reflective tone differed from any other he had received from her. It breathed through every line of it a calm satisfaction, a resigned acceptance of the conditions of her life, that was in no wise morbid, that held, indeed, a note of hope, of quiet gladness even. Clearly for her the turbulent discontent was past. She had glided into some forgotten backwater, and discovered there beauties that lie unsuspected in these restful retreats of the mind.

"I am thinking much of you to-day," she wrote. "There is nothing unusual in that; but to-day my thoughts are more intent on you than at other times. Your friendship means so much to me. I doubt if any woman has ever received more unselfish service than I have had from you. It has been a tremendous help to me.

"Life has been very difficult often since we parted,—it is difficult still at times; but each year brings some compensation. And in waiting on him, in caring for the straining thread of life,—it is straining very fine now,—I have learnt to understand him better, and to get back some of the old kindly feeling which I believed was dead. He is very dependent on me, and, despite the querulousness of ill health, truly grateful. I am so glad we acted as we did, my dear,—that we didn't shirk. Plainly this is the work it was intended I should do. It is irksome to me no longer. And if in doing it I have lost my youth, and that which was infinitely more precious, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that the happiness we both relinquished remains a beautiful, untarnished memory, which for me, at least, lightens the burden of these weary years.

"I am growing old now, dear. You would scarcely know me. My hair is turning grey. I looked in the glass to-day and saw many little lines in my face which used not to be there. What does it matter? The outward semblance of youth, like the restless fever of love, is something which remains with us only for a short while. But these things live on in our hearts, warm and glowing, like the fires on the hearth of winter when the glory of summer is gone. To me you will always seem as I knew you first, as you will ever remain in my thoughts—a king among men. I hope my son will grow up brave and strong, like yourself. In my children I renew my youth."

Dare rested his elbow on the desk, and supported his head on his hand, and fell to thinking. "The straining thread of

life,—it is straining very fine now...” When, he wondered, with his gaze fixed on the closely written lines, would his summons come?

The End.

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