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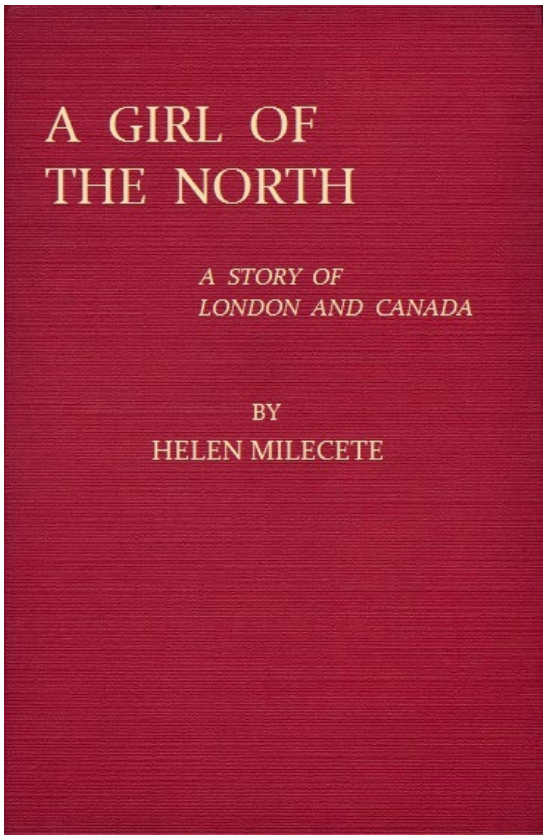

A GIRL OF THE NORTH

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A GIRL OF THE NORTH

A STORY OF
LONDON AND CANADA

BY
HELEN MILECETE
AUTHOR OF “A DETACHED PIRATE,” ETC.

SECOND EDITION

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A GIRL OF THE NORTH

CHAPTER I

The world called it failure: he called it success, and the thought evolved itself into happiness for a time.

George Archer was a man of unusual talent and power. He had translated the most recent book by a celebrated Danish naturalist, besides which he had acquired some fame as a naturalist on his own account; and the small world of men, who trouble about such things, mentioned his name with a certain amount of respect as that of one to whom mysteries are revealed.

He was rich. He had travelled all over the world. At last, wishing to go to Canada, the idea of writing a book on the different varieties of Canadian fish came to him with the charm of inspiration, of freedom, and of novelty.

He was singularly unpractical, and given to great enthusiasms.

The glamour of Canada fell upon him; he was fascinated by the long cold winter, with its tempests and swinging winds, its drifting snow, and the endless battle with the princes and powers of the air: by the spring, too, with its force when all the brooks ran and overflowed with the melting of the snow in the hot sun, and the glorious long, light, glowing days, when everything broke into life with suddenness. After this came a gorgeous summer, with hot vibrating days, which brought magnificent flowers into blossom; and then autumn with its Indian summer and stillness—a sort of grey stillness, as if the dear dead came back for a space. The wind died then, and there was only a movement of the air laden with sweetness as it passed over blueberry barrens and lonely stretches of black, still lakes, which possessed the charm of the unknown, the fascination of the forest crowded with moose and bears. George Archer loved the country with its colouring of triumph—trees, sky, and water, all shared in the same glory.

When he came out, he brought letters to various people in Canada, and he collected many important facts for his piscatorial work during his first summer—in the autumn he met Naomi Fontaine, one quarter French, more than a quarter English (her enemies added one half Indian). Archer loved her and married her.

They settled down in an old house, which he rebuilt and made more than comfortable. It stood near an arm of the sea, about two miles from a town called Musquodobit, and in the middle of woods, of salmon rivers, and lakes.

They were happy—perfectly, gloriously happy. They made no plans for the future. To-day was theirs; they loved it, and for three years their happiness lasted. Then Naomi died of pneumonia, and left him alone with their daughter Launa.

Mr. Archer stayed at Musquodobit, for he had no desire to return to England, his relations having received the news of his marriage with certain questions—was Naomi a native? Their idea of natives was hazy, and ran to wild orgies, cannabalism, and no clothing. Had she any relations? George said she was a Roman Catholic and a Canadian, then the letters grew fewer and fewer. Archer did not remember his people. He loved his life; the freedom of it enthralled him. He fished and hunted at the same time he pursued the research about bones, which brought him many letters, much contradiction, and labour.

He could not bear to leave the land which Naomi had loved, whilst dwelling there without her

was misery and torment, and yet he loved it too. That land exercises an indescribable fascination over impressionable folk; its intenseness, its wild beauty and passion, the rapid, boiling rivers full of fish, and the quiet, still lakes; the grandeur of the granite rocks, the hills, and vast forests of pine, fir, and maple; and, above all, the turbulent rapture and stormy joy of the sea, crashing against the iron-bound coast. Archer's home was situated about one hundred yards from the shore. The bay was well sheltered, and two miles below lay the open sea. It was near enough to be within reach when Archer wearied of the calm of the bay; and near enough for them to hear it surge, moan, and roar at times, and to be always in sun and storm—altogether loveable.

Launa Archer was an ugly baby. When her mother died she was a year old, and soon became intelligent enough to interest her father. He was often away, and left her in charge of her nurse Eliza, who loved her; and the child grew from babyhood into a sprite of mischief, always cheerful, always laughing, often naughty, and fond of forgiving Eliza, with much kindness and bounteousness, when she reproved her.

Mr. Archer's house, "Solitude," was a large building, with an appearance of care and comfort. There were neighbours three and four miles away. But he cared little for them while Naomi lived, and less after her death. So Launa grew from infancy into childhood alone. She played with the dogs, and in summer let them run among the long grass, which was for hay, and which their wild bounding did not improve. How she loved to see them tearing through it and chasing each other. And then she spent days by the brook, sailing boats and paddling and splashing. Many mighty fleets she launched, which sailed away and never came back, drifting down the current to the sea. She played with the big white daisies in the pasture, and gathered them with huge yellow buttercups. She dabbled in the salt water, and ran up and down the beach, while the dogs hunted the kingfishers and yapped in vain at the crows. It was a heavenly life for a child—lonely never, solitary, perhaps, for she had but frequent glimpses of her father, who journeyed north, south, east, and west, seeking many things, principally forgetfulness, or rather a memory that should revive no pain.

CHAPTER II

When Launa Archer was ten years old her father realised that she must be taught; so he went forth to seek a governess.

Mr. Archer had grown into a silent man, as is often very naturally the case with men who spend much of their lives in the woods. But Launa found him an excellent companion, full of knowledge about all the beasts of the field and fowls of the air, and able to tell wonderful stories of "Ring, the king's son," Norwegian fairy stories, and Indian legends. Archer found the governess problem hard to solve. For once in his life he distrusted his own inclinations, and asked advice of Mrs. Butler, the wife of one of his neighbours. She had no children, but she longed to be consulted about Launa, on the principle that childless women know most about children. Mrs. Butler disapproved of Launa, for she was shy, had retired under the table during one of Mrs. Butler's visitations, and refused to come forth until the lady had left, giving as an excuse that Mrs. Butler shook hands too much and too often.

Mrs. Butler grew voluble, and George Archer somewhat distressed. She strongly advised school; indeed, it was her war-cry. School would endow Launa with lady-like habits. Her listener frowned. School would give her pleasant companionship, and a knowledge of all those things which it was necessary for young ladies to acquire.

"Is not curiosity, the hereditary tendency of Mother Eve strongly inherent in all women?" asked Mr. Archer. "Launa will learn for herself."

"Yes, perhaps," vaguely murmured Mrs. Butler. "Still, if I were you I would send her to school."

George Archer immediately became conscious of many things he did not want his Launa to become or to learn. She would either be miserable at school or dislike "Solitude" on her return thither; either result would be disagreeable. He wanted Launa to remain natural; consequently he did not advertise for a governess. He had an idea he might meet a suitable teacher. Mrs. Butler told him that in all probability he would marry such a paragon as he desired, and he smiled without contradicting her.

He visited his friends at Baltimore, New York, and Halifax, which was near where he lived, and in New York he found what he sought. Her name was Black; she was a German-American. Her age was thirty, though her face suggested forty and her figure twenty. When she played the piano Archer almost worshipped her talent. He had found the long-looked-for solace—in the music he saw Naomi; they were together again. And whenever Miss Black played he seemed to lose himself in a heavenly dream. If she could teach the wild little lady at "Solitude" to play! Miss Black could row and paddle; she had read, and did read; she could walk far, and play tennis. She was full of intelligence, and her German was good.

It seemed to the perplexed parent that the day of the millennium was about to dawn when he went, home with this trophy. If the dogs and Launa liked her then he could dare to be content.

Launa had never known anyone she did not like except Mrs. Butler, who reciprocated the feeling. The idea of a governess had no dreaded associations for her; a companion was her greatest desire. Eliza had grown too fat to climb fences and to go out in the canoe—a form of pleasure she dreaded and detested, for Eliza could not swim, nor would she learn.

Miss Black—Launa christened her "Whitey"—was a success. When Mrs. Butler heard of her she said the world would talk, but when she saw Whitey's livid face and weather-beaten countenance, she wanted to know what her history was, and talked about Mr. Archer's lonely and defenceless situation as though he were a castle facing north-east.

The dogs loved Miss Black; her sitting-room was always a haven of refuge when they were wet and tired, also when Launa had steeplechases and Fatsey, an old dog, would not and could not jump over a broomstick three feet from the ground, then, he too, sought sanctuary with Whitey.

Whitey taught Launa music, and the child worked earnestly, undismayed by the drudgery, with the hope of some day being able to play like her teacher, and her reward always came in the form of freedom for a while. With Whitey, she read many books, stories, history, and poetry. And as Miss Black had travelled far and wide she made all she taught interesting.

This odd couple were very happy together. In the winter they snowshoed, going for long tramps through the woods. They were frequently out in stormy weather, for Miss Black loved the wind as much as Launa did, and the wild turmoil of snow and tempest attracted them both. They explored the whole surrounding country together. Miss Black and Launa were also very fond of wandering to the far away lakes—the big black lakes with long shadows and deep reflections of trees and rocks—lakes whose solitude and silence filled one with a sort of apprehension, that whispered of horrors, past or to come—the ghosts of dead braves might wander there as a foretaste of the happy hunting ground. The hills were high and steep, covered with brushwood which was very thick, and at intervals there were rocks and holes that made climbing perilous, but Launa and Miss Black did not mind difficulties. On one occasion Mr. Archer took them to camp out for a week and to fish. How they loved it! The queer smell of the wood smoke, the joy of cooking in the ashes, and the talk round the fire in the twilight before bedtime, when the stars came out and the moon hung half-way up in the sky, while the firelight threw shadows all around, making the white birch trees look ghostly in the dim light, while in the distance the little stream rushed on to the sea.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Launa, who had a queer, passionate temper, a horror of restraint of any kind, and a great dislike to being disappointed or thwarted, was fifteen, she was tall, and slight, all arms and legs, with long thin fingers, and well-shaped feet. Her skin was tanned, with a tinge of red in her cheeks, her eyes were brown, as was her hair. She could paddle, and walk on snowshoes like an Indian, her voice had a low soft richness in it that reminded Mr. Archer of a squaw—which made him wonder whether there had been Indian blood in Naomi or not?

But Launa had a stronger look than her mother; she was less of the dainty French girl, and she possessed a greater desire to rise, to achieve something, possessing a less sublime acquiescence in fate or destiny than Naomi, who had been sweeter, more yielding, and fulfilling Mr. Archer's preconceived, primeval idea of a woman. Sometimes he feared for his daughter, and that curious belief in herself, which she displayed with a half-expressed idea, that she would be able to command fate, an early sign of her masterful independence.

"When I am big," Launa said to her father one day, "I shall write a book about the woods and the Indians; no one writes about them, or seems to know how."

Her father smiled.

"You must learn to keep still."

"The arranging and selecting of ideas must be difficult," she said, "and I always come to grief over commas. I love full stops, but Whitey says my sentences are jerky. It must be difficult to disguise one's mood when writing books, to write when one is tired or weary; I could not do it."

"You will perhaps be glad to do it some day." Then changing the subject, he said, "I am going to the Reserve to-day, will you come?"

"What time shall we go?"

"At three," he answered.

Launa rushed off to order tea to take with them, as well as some tea and sugar for presents to the Indians.

They drove about six miles to the Reserve. It was a desolate piece of country, and lay along the side of a large lake, from which ran a little trout stream. The Indians lived in cottages, poorly built shanties, and they welcomed the Archers with joy. There was an old grandmother, a terrible old person in a red flannel bed-jacket, a very short skirt, and a short pipe, which she smoked with fervour. Her grey hair hung down on both sides of her brown face, and she waved her long thin fingers as she related tales of her magic cures, for she was a doctor and made herb decoctions for anyone who was ailing. She talked in a low mysterious voice.

"I give him little medicine, yer know," she said, with a leer and a drawl, nodding her funny old head with an air of confidence in her listener's understanding and belief.

Miss Black was afraid of her, and always felt sure that Mrs. Andrew would not be too good to omit mixing poison with her medicine, if she considered it desirable the sick person should not recover.

Launa listened to the old grandmother's stories with rapt attention, until Andrew, the witch's husband, came to say he had lighted a fire by the lake, and that Abram had launched his canoe to take Launa in it after tea.

Andrew and Launa caught some trout, which they cooked at the wood fire, and Launa made tea. She presented Mrs. Andrew with a large parcel of it to that lady's joy, though she merely grunted her thanks, and then offered Launa a cup out of her own tea-pot. But as the Indians seldom or never empty the tea-pot (they consider it a waste to throw away the old leaves, and keep on adding a few new ones, which they let boil to get their full flavour), Launa knew better than to drink it. It was, in truth, a deadly concoction.

Abram pushed his canoe into the water, and taking a paddle in one hand started with a little run

and then jumped into the end of the canoe, which shot out into the middle of the lake. It was a wonderful jump, and Launa never tired of seeing it.

"There is no one who can do that as Abram does," she said with admiration. "He is splendid, isn't he, Andrew? Abram, Abram!" called Launa. "Take me up to the end of the lake!"

He brought the canoe in again, and she took her paddle and knelt in the bow. They went off together, her firm figure, with its graceful arm movement, erect, muscular, and supple. Oh! the joy of those days! The joy of living and of doing! The rapid, firm strokes, and the movement!

Launa paid her visit to the opera house in New York, whither her father took her with Miss Black for a winter, and then her dreams were realised. She heard the "Nibelungenlied," "The Meistersinger," "Tannhauser," besides selections from "Parsifal"; she also attended numerous concerts. Music took the place of her out-of-door life, and she became so absorbed in it that she only occasionally missed and regretted her former wanderings. It was as if she had experienced its wonderful power for the first time, and drank from a cup of intoxicating sweetness.

She went to dances, and discovered that men found her attractive, and naturally she soon learned how to make herself agreeable. At the same time she realised that most men love a woman for her bodily charm.

"Men are very animalish, Whitey," said Launa one day, after having made a successful appearance at an evening reception.

Miss Black gasped. She had ignored the existence of men as lovers, except in history and in books, while teaching Launa.

"All men are not alike," she said vaguely.

"No, of course not. Father is perfect. Few men are like him."

When they returned to "Solitude," Launa worked with renewed ardour, and practised with joy—she wanted to play well. She read all sorts of books, and after a course of lectures on Greek literature, she turned with avidity to Plato, to Epictetus. Of German books she read many; to Miss Black's regret she had outgrown Marlitt. For a woman who could do things, who did not fear storm or rain, Miss Black was singularly afraid of the knowledge of good and evil. Evil belonged especially to the poor and low, and to men, who gave it up when they put on dress-clothes, and were in the society of ladies—the humanising influence of ladies! A dress suit was the veneer that completely covered the brute-beast in a man.

About this time Launa turned affectionately to her father. She found him sympathetic, for he understood her, and he never gasped.

"You remind me of your mother," he said one day to her.

"Tell me about her," she said, flushing with pleasure.

"She was very sweet—how can I tell you? I loved her; half of me, the best, the happy half died with her; it was as if I were killed. . . . And we were so happy."

"It was terrible," said Launa. "Life, father, seems sometimes to be horribly, terribly sad." She said this with the air of one who has made a new discovery, and it amused her father.

"Why is it?" she asked.

"I do not know."

"And what is the good?"

He did not answer.

It dawned upon the small world round "Solitude" that Launa was attractive, and so the inhabitants came to visit and to criticise. They all went to Quebec, and they stayed several nights at different houses, where she enjoyed herself, and where she was admired—especially at one of the balls she attended.

Among all the men she met, English as well as Canadian, for there was a garrison in Halifax, a man named Paul Harvey interested her most. He was a Canadian, who possessed a place about twenty miles from "Solitude." He was tall and dark. His skin was tanned from the out-of-door life he led; he had a peculiarly high forehead, and high cheek bones, and his body had the lithe look common to men who spend their lives in doing, and who are never troubled with superfluous flesh. His keen eyes glanced into one's inner consciousness, and seemed hard, until he smiled. He walked with the Indian stride, which is quick and quiet. Of course he could ride, and he had the strong capable hands of a man who has been brought up to do things, and who could do them well. Paul Harvey and Launa soon became firm friends, for they understood each other. They loved the same things; the witchery of the woods, of the canoe, and of the sea was real and tangible to them both, and he loved music, as did she. In the long spring days they often met, and he was full of admiration for this girl, who was so strong and so fearless.

George Archer frequently invited Paul to "Solitude," without the least idea of encouraging any feeling on Paul's part for Launa, who in her father's eyes was still a child; that any man should think of her as a possible wife never occurred to him, but then Archer's idea of a wife (the other man's wife) was a submissive woman, and Launa was not that.

One day in May Mr. Archer had gone to Chezettcook to fish, and Launa was anxious to pay him a visit. Paul expressed himself desirous of driving her down to the river which her father owned.

So the two left "Solitude" at two o'clock on a still day, very sultry and hot; a haze lay thick over the land, and the sun shone red with a lurid glare, for the haze was the smoke of fires in the woods.

They drove along very rapidly, not talking much, though occasionally Paul would look at her and she at him, and they smiled with a sense of well-being and mutual bliss.

"I think," said Paul at last, "that the Bible makes a mistake when it says, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain'; it should be love."

"Oh, Paul," she exclaimed. "The smoke! it is getting so thick."

Paul was holding his head down.

"Shall we turn back? The fire is crossing the road in front of us. I am afraid we can't get through it."

He turned his horse quickly.

"Launa, it seems as if it were cutting us off."

They were in a winding road, a crosscut. He started Micmac at a gallop. If the fire were before them! There was a long hill to climb.

The trap swayed and jolted, for the road was bad. They were tearing along; the wind was behind them, and they could hear the crackle which was getting nearer, rising to a hideous roar. A river crossed the road below the hill—had they time to get to it?

Paul wrapped the rug round his companion, put it over her head, and covered her mouth.

"Keep it tight," he exclaimed, "and sit still."

Then he began to use his whip, having tied his own handkerchief over his mouth. Micmac was going more slowly in spite of the whip; it seemed as if he were terrified and paralysed by the pursuing fiend.

"You are not afraid," said Paul with difficulty, through his handkerchief.

"No," gasped Launa, "not with you."

He put his hand on her shoulder.

"Keep your mouth well covered; the fire is before us. We must go through it."

On, on they tore; the smoke almost choked her. It was so terribly thick that Paul could not see Micmac, though his eyes burnt, and he kept them open with difficulty. Then the flames ran up a dead pine tree in front of him, and shed a lurid light through the smoke. The heat was intense; he shut his smarting eyes, and trusted Micmac would keep the road.

"Oh, if the bridge—a wooden bridge—were not down!" "Were not down!" repeated itself; "Were not down!"

They were in the midst of the fire now; the roaring was tremendous, and the trees were flaming and crackling on all sides. Paul covered his eyes with one hand, and used the whip with the other. It was like the finish of a race, a race for life, down the hill at a gallop. But the bridge? It had already caught, and the wood was smoking, when Micmac stopped with a jerk, and Paul jumped out and took hold of him.

"You must, old boy, you must," he murmured. "Once over we are pretty safe. Good horse, good horse!"

The trembling Micmac refused again; the bridge was hot, and frightened him. Then he went at it with a rush, with Paul still at his head, half-running, half-dragged by the horse. The river was wide, and the wind was from the north, blowing the fire down on them over the road, but not across the stream in the direction in which they were going.

Paul got into the trap quickly, and Micmac galloped on and on and on until, though the smoke was still thick, they were safe. At last Paul pulled up, and looked back. The road along which they had come was a sheet of flame, and he shuddered as he thought of what might have happened. There were so many pine trees to burn, and to fall burning, while the side of the river on which they were was covered with alder bushes and rocks, and the wind, too, was blowing that way.

"Now!" he gasped hoarsely, for his throat was dry and parched. "Now!"

And Launa threw off her rug. Paul was black, his face was flaming and smutty, his cap had blown off, and his hair stood on end. Her rug was singed. Micmac had a burn, where a piece of wood had fallen on him, and he was trembling when Launa got out and patted him, talking while she did it.

"My darling," murmured Paul, going up to her, "you are safe; you behaved like an angel."

He looked at his hands and did not touch her.

"So did Micmac. Look at him, and you—you are burnt, your hands are sore. Oh, I am so sorry! Do, do drive back to 'Solitude,' and—and—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, drive back!" she said.

They took a short cut across a half made road, and so got behind the fire. Paul talked very little, and she not at all, though she heard "My darling" over and over again, and wondered.

Paul stayed at "Solitude," and after dinner Launa, Whitey, and he sat on the veranda and watched the fire, still burning in the distance. The whole sky was in a blaze, but luckily the wind was dying down. They could see the flames running from tree to tree; they could hear the roar, but they were quite safe, for the water was between them. In the dark, Paul silently, secretly took her hand, and they talked to Miss Black of the annual regatta, and of Canadian ferns. A few stars blazed high up in the sky, the others were dimmed by the lurid glow, and the aspen tree quivered in the dying breeze, while the waves of the incoming tide tapped the boats gently below.

Launa felt in that state of happiness, which says, "*Last, last, last.*"

The annual regatta came off that year in July. Everyone knows the St. Aspenquid Regatta. There were the usual boat races, and excitements and innocent fooleries; but the best of all was the canoe race for the championship of Canada. Paul Harvey had entered for it with his friend Jack Howston.

Before the start they both came to the steam launch, from which Launa was viewing the races. Harvey, with his strong half-brown, half-white arms bare above his elbows, looked like work. After a word or two with Launa, as she leaned down to him, they paddled away to the start. She heard the pistol shot and the hoarse murmur of the crowd, proclaiming the race had begun. Far away in the distance the brown canoes could be seen; Launa watched breathlessly as they came nearer. The paddles flashed in the sun and on the gleaming dancing water. To Launa, the long, strong, slow strokes with the absence of haste was maddening; she stood, not daring to move, watching the white forms as they came nearer, nearer, the iron muscles in each man showing up as he paddled on and on. Paul's canoe was third in the contest.

"Third," announced Launa. Her voice sounded level, she was just able to hide her apprehension lest he might fail, and her longing for his success, which, nevertheless, made her desirous of burying her face in her hands until the race was over. Her hostess, Mrs. Montmorency, stood near her, serene, alert, and slight, enjoying her successful party with a little interest in the races, and a

little curiosity as to Launa's attitude towards Paul Harvey.

The men ahead were doing their utmost; in the second canoe, too, they were working hard; but the men in the dark canoe seemed to be dead, dull—what was it?

The crowd shouted "St. John, St. John!" for the canoe owned by that town was in front. Disappointment was in the cry. But suddenly the third canoe gave a spring; it shot forward with a leap, and a bound, and a swirl through the water, and then on and on. The two men were working, straining. They passed the second canoe, and the finish was near; the strong sinews under the arms of the two men showed up clearly. Had they waited too long? . . . On they crept, and at last with a final, splendid rush—oh, the ease of it, the seeming lack of effort—the brown canoe shot ahead of the other. They had won, won. Amid shrieks, cheers, and waving of handkerchiefs the heroes, the winners paddled away to change.

Launa had been on the verge of tears, caused by excitement, fear, apprehension, and heaven knows what besides. She was unable to drink her tea because of a lump in her throat. Paul paddled alone over to her, and climbed on board the *Lethe*.

"You've won," she said. "I am very glad."

"And so am I—glad. I am more than glad. It means good luck; it means I shall win my heart's desire; it means—" he almost said "You."

Launa did not answer; she gave him her hand as if they had met for the first time, and he held it longer than a man does when saying, "How do you do?" It was like an involuntary childish caress.

He stayed with her until it was time for the single canoe race, for which he was acting umpire. She was sweet, with a delightful unexpectedness which fascinated him, as did her varying good looks, her firm, lithe body.

"I wish they had a ladies' canoe race," he said. "You would enter for it, would you not?"

"Oh yes."

"They will certainly have one next year, and you will win."

Launa laughed.

"I must go," he said with regret. "But I shall soon come back."

"We shall leave soon now," said Mrs. Montmorency. "Will you come and dine at Paradise to-morrow, Paul? We are going over there, and shall drive home by moonlight. Perhaps you will come and meet us?"

"Thank you," he replied. "I will."

Then he got into his canoe, and Launa watched him paddle away with slow strokes—regretful strokes they seemed to her. His paddling was so unlike that of the other men, so strong, and his body swayed to the motion. Mrs. Montmorency brought up a Mr. Evans and introduced him to Launa. He was a young Englishman, with a respect for the institutions of his country, a love for his dinner, and for pretty women.

He began by asking whether Launa considered Miss Montmorency pretty, and whether she liked Wagner. His theories were that a man can tell a woman's character most quickly from her ideas on the subject of other women, as well as from the music she affects.

Near them sat Mr. Archer and the hostess talking. Launa heard a word here and there as she listened to Mr. Evans' agreeable remarks, and then she heard her father say:

"Harvey is a fool or worse. The Indians will not stand it. Peter Joe came to me about it; he says he would kill him, only that he is sure he would be hanged for it."

"You think they will take some quiet revenge," said Mrs. Montmorency, "and more deadly."

"Yes, I do."

"In their mind a child constitutes marriage?"

"If its father does not want to marry anyone else," he answered. "They will be satisfied if he lets things alone, but he won't."

"He does want to marry?"

"I think so. Money will considerably improve his house, and pay off some of the mortgages; he will, I expect, take a wife with money."

"It is terrible, and such a pity. I always liked Mr. Harvey for his mother's sake, and I have ever made him welcome."

"I advised him to marry her—the squaw," said Mr. Archer. "It will finish him socially, but in other ways it will make a man of him. Harvey is—"

Here they walked away to the bow of the *Lethe*, and Launa's companion talked on, and she answered him.

She impressed him with her interest, her air of being fascinated by him, and all the while she was in torment. Harvey had held her hand! She took off her pale tan suede glove and threw it into the water. It burnt her; her hands felt hot.

Her quick action puzzled Mr. Evans.

"Miss Archer, your glove! Is it a challenge? Do you mean me to go after it?"

"No, no," she answered. "I hate it; I do not want it. Oh, we are going."

The *Lethe* had steam up, and was puffing and moving slowly.

"I am so glad. It is very hot. How cool the air is."

They passed Paul in his canoe. He waved his hand to Launa, who was staring into the water, and appeared absorbed in the depths or in her companion.

CHAPTER IV

THAT night Launa could not sleep. She was so angry with Paul Harvey and with herself; she loathed

herself. Her ideas of men and their passions were those of a young girl, to whom passion is unknown, to whom men appear as gods. She considered a man must love a woman by whom he has a child. Love, love! Paul was the father of a squaw's child—of a squaw's child; it reiterated in her brain until she almost writhed with anguish. She had thought of him as always her own. The shame of it! And worse than shame, the pain, because she would have to give him up. Oh, to get home! To be able to wander about alone! Away on the big barrens where she could move as she liked, and tire herself out. Their wind-laden sweetness would revive her, their vastness would bring peace; she was so tired of the life away from "Solitude." She forgot how much joy hope had always given to her. She had hoped. The past tense is easily conjugated once, but to live in the past for ever, to regret for ever is torment, death-like torment. She resolved not to regret, not to suffer, and so she read Carlyle until daylight.

Next day Mrs. Montmorency's party drove to Paradise. There were wonderful beech woods in which to walk. Paul met them there. His first look was for Launa; she was standing talking to two men, and he joined them and waited with patience, until at last he asked her to go for a walk.

"No, thank you," she said. "I am too tired to walk."

"I want to show you the trees. Come into the wood and sit down, you can rest there."

"Well, I will walk," she answered.

She looked at him with an involuntary air of appeal. She was not afraid of him, she assured herself, only afraid of herself. Some day he might tell her things, ask her questions, and she, through weakmindedness, might answer. They started to walk, and she still meditated. Why should she think he cared for her? Ah yes, and why did she want him to care? These questions opened an endless vista of ideas and feelings before her. She felt indifferent for the moment, as no doubt he did.

"The view is lovely," she exclaimed at last. "Let us go to the village."

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, coming nearer and looking at her.

"Of many things. I think in heaven I should miss the sweetness of the air which is here."

"So should I."

They walked down the road past a cluster of Indian cottages. A young squaw with a baby in her arms sat in front of one of them. Launa looked at her and at the child; its hair was more curly, and not quite so black as the long, straight locks of Indian children.

"What a queer baby!" she exclaimed.

She looked at her companion. He was digging with his stick in the red clay of the road; his eyes were hidden; a red flush mounted to his forehead, and he was singularly embarrassed. She turned away and walked slowly on, followed by him in silence.

"What is that noise?" she said.

They heard a sound like a moan quite near them, and it grew louder; something—some animal—was suffering intensely.

"Look!" she cried.

In a ditch by the roadside lay a horse, thin, so thin that his bones seemed as if they would come through his skin. A few children clustered round, throwing stones at it at intervals and poking it with sticks. Blood slowly oozed from a wound in its head, and its poor body was covered with sores.

"Do something," she said, and her voice quivered with the horror of it. "Can't we put it out of its misery? Whose horse is it?"

Paul had driven away the children, and gone close to it.

"Someone has half shot it; it must be in torture."

"Go and borrow a rifle," she said. "I will stay here and keep away those little fiends. Do go."

"You are not afraid?"

"Afraid? No, only so sorry. What horrible, unavailing suffering! Go, and be quick."

He walked briskly away, and she strolled up and down. The children came near to stare at her, but they ceased to torment the horse. She could not bear its eyes; they seemed to beg of her to kill it, and she could do nothing. She clasped her hands together with such force that they hurt her as she longed and longed for Paul's return. It began to grow dusk. She had forgotten tea, and the rest of the party—would they be looking for her, and imagining all sorts of things? Meanwhile the horse's moans grew louder; the young squaw with the baby came slowly down the road—the baby was crying.

Launa asked if she knew who owned the horse.

"A man named Morris, who lives down the road four miles away. He turned him out to die; he is too old to work or eat."

The baby wailed.

"Your child is ill," said Launa.

"Yes," grunted the girl, who was so young and almost pretty; "my grandmother cursed him."

"Cursed him?"

"Because of his father, he—"

"Oh," interrupted the other, "will Paul never come? If he would only be quick."

She could not bear these revelations. The moans of the horse and the shrill misery of the child were torturing her.

Someone suddenly threw a stone from behind the shelter of a spruce tree; it struck the horse, which gave a sharp scream. In the distance Launa heard footsteps. She ran down the road. It was Paul.

"I am so glad you have come," she said breathlessly, quickly. "Hurry. Did you get a rifle?"

"Are you *glad*?" his voice changed. "Yes, I have it."

"The horse is suffering so terribly."

He looked at her with a certain wistfulness which was unusual.

He is going to tell me he is sorry for *that*, she thought, remembering the squaw and the child who had come near them.

“Go, go and put him out of his misery,” she said, with quick anger and excitement. “There is so much torture, so much suffering for animals, women, and children. Oh, God! it is awful!”

He turned and saw the Indian girl.

“You,” he said merely, but with bitterness, almost hatred, in his tone. “Go away.”

“You are a brute,” said Launa, “to talk to her in that way. What has she done? Go and kill the horse.”

“Not until you are further away,” he said, with gentleness. “He may, and probably will, scream. That woman is not fit for you to talk to or to touch.”

For one moment Launa felt afraid, and she wanted to ask him to come with her down the road out of earshot, away from it all. The twilight was growing dense. The horse would scream; ugh! how horrible the suffering! There were witches abroad in the night—witches of selfishness, of pain, of terror. She wanted Paul to put his arms round her, to kiss her, even with the girl near with his child in her arms. She felt degraded, and yet loath to let him leave her, until she remembered the horse.

“Come with me,” said Paul, and he took her hand and led her down the road. “There is a big rock here. You will wait for me? Sit down and I will wrap your cloak round you; you are cold.”

Her teeth chattered with apprehension as he walked firmly back. She listened with her fingers in her ears, hearing only the thump of her heart beating. One, two sharp reports and a sort of checked scream told her it was over before he came back.

They walked quickly to the hotel, where the rest of the party were waiting dinner. They were curious as well as hungry, and anxious to hear the result of all this wood walking. They discovered nothing; neither Launa nor Paul appeared happy, or at ease. He ate his dinner with indifference; she ate nothing, and felt as if all her body, beginning with her teeth, was beyond her control.

Before they left to drive home he said:—

“You misunderstood me to-night. I want to tell you about that squaw.”

“I know it. Do not tell me.”

“You are angry with me because of her. I could not help it.”

“I despise a man who could not help it,” she answered. “I am sorry for her and for you. You could shoot the horse.”

“You are angry about her?” he asked again.

“I am outraged, not merely angry. Why,” she continued suddenly, “should there be one law for me and one for her? I could not bear anyone who treated her claim as nothing. She will belong to you, be one of you—” she paused.

“I would never treat her claim as of no value,” he said quickly, “but—”

“You will never come again to me,” she said.

Had she said too much? Would he understand? She continued:

“Do not explain. Be careful—they may think of revenge.”

“That is enough. And so it is good-bye? Good-bye, then.”

Mrs. Montmorency took Launa home with her in the brougham. They talked about clothes, while Launa remembered the queer dark evening, the half-pretty Indian girl, and heard the wailing sobs of her baby, and then she saw Paul’s face full of anger. Love was there, hatred as well, as he said, “Go away,” to the girl. She shuddered, and he thought her angry—simply angry—good that he could think she felt so slight an emotion. Women are angry every day with their maids, and their dressmakers, and their rivals, and it leaves no impression, not even a wrinkle; there remains no ache whatever, unless it be weariness.

“I *love* crepon,” she said to Mrs. Montmorency. “It is so soft and graceful.”

Paul Harvey did not go again to “Solitude.” Miss Black lamented his absence loudly. From inquiries she made she learned that he had gone away to the Restigouche with some Englishmen to fish.

Launa took up shorthand as a sedative, and worked with great diligence. But she learned nothing. However, as neither her father nor Miss Black was aware of this, because of their utter ignorance of shorthand, its failure as an attainable subject caused no surprise to them.

Mr. Archer went to New York, and then Launa frequently took long wandering walks—over stretches of rocky country with narrow, gloomy, cuttings full of granite boulders, where there were caves.

One day she went, in her canoe, up a stream, until she reached a chain of lakes where she could paddle on and on—far away into space—where the stillness was maddening yet restful.

The peace of autumn, of approaching death, lay on the woods. The maples, with their gorgeous colouring, shone and flamed in the bright sun; the birches were yellow, almost gold, in the brilliant light; occasionally a leaf fell slowly, it reminded Launa of a ghost of the end; there was dread in the creeping slowness, as of the invincible, powerful march of a quiet enemy. The breeze sprung up gently, it rippled the water, and stirred the tall pine trees slowly with a rhythmic movement, and the sun began to sink. She gazed again and again at the warm rapturous colouring, the triumph of the trees at the end of their summer life, for the leaves have a glorious finish, and then she turned her canoe round and paddled swiftly back to “Solitude.”

Everything there was in confusion; Miss Black had been taken suddenly ill. She was still unconscious, and they had sent for the doctor, who arrived only to tell them she was dead.

Launa did not know her father’s address. Miss Black’s relations were merely cousins, to whom her death and funeral were matters of indifference.

So Launa stayed alone with the dead woman weeping tears of sorrow—some tears were for the loss of companionship, some for the love and never ceasing care. The idea of a funeral was terrible to her; death meant earth and creepy things. At last Mr. Archer got his telegram, and came home.

Launa felt as if the end had come to her. Death, the intruder, had entered into her life; he was a powerful enemy, and hitherto she had only regarded him as a sleeping brother.

Mr. Archer’s grief was not perfunctory, he grieved honestly and really. Miss Black was his friend

—if any longing for a nearer and perhaps dearer connection (the dearness thereof is wont to depart when the nearness is an accomplished fact) had ever crossed his mind, it had crossed only and never taken root. The constancy of man is more frequently attributable to circumstances than to everlasting love.

Mr. Archer observed that Launa had grown different—older, more absorbed in something, more sympathetic. Always a child of deep emotions, she had developed into a woman. But because her heart was not navigable to floundering old women, the world near “Solitude” called her cold, unfeeling, and indifferent.

Her father regretted this alteration. She had been a child, but apparently death had stepped in and changed her.

He studied her gravely and with attention. “Solitude” was dreary. Launa’s admirers grew weary of vain visits, of fruitless attempts to see her, and they ceased to come. They said she was in love with an unknown man; they had to account for her refusal to see them, and pique and vanity suggested this solution.

After a long, cold winter, spring was beginning. All life was breaking out again. The world was glad, triumphant, new, and Mr. George Archer’s mind turned to England. Launa must go there for change of scene and air, so they left Canada on the first of May.

Launa and Paul had never met since the memorable day he had shot the horse. Mr. Archer casually mentioned that Paul was in Montreal. Launa had a burning desire to hear tidings of him, but she repressed it; she pushed it back, back, back in her mind, far away into those cupboards everyone has, and keeps locked and sealed always, by sheer force of will.

CHAPTER V

The long streak of smoke from the steamer’s funnel lay black on the calm sea; the strong throb of the engines sounded like the measure of a waltz to Launa. She sat on deck every day after the first woe of sea-sickness was over, and felt utterly and completely miserable. She wanted to go back again, for the ache of unconquered pain remained in her heart. She gave herself a little shake and tried to make herself agreeable to a young man who was returning to England to be married. He told her happily that the engines were playing the “Wedding March”; to her it was a hateful discord, with the refrain of a waltz to which she had danced with Paul. The young man hummed Mendelssohn, and she heard Paul’s voice, and fancied his kisses on the warm cheek of the squaw.

“When I am married I would rather have the ‘Dead March in Saul’ played than that,” said Launa at last.

The triumphant whistler gazed incredulously at her. He found her irresponsive, so he left her alone, and went to get a whisky and soda. No doubt the poor girl was feeling sick. She would not argue about anticipation and realisation, or time and love. She seemed so cold. He could imagine her sailing on through life alone. She evidently did not care for men; anyhow she did not encourage him.

Launa was occupied with her thoughts. She was trying to seal up her life as if it were a book and could be put away. The long, uneventful days were good for reflection, but they were trying and full of remorse and regret.

“I am young,” she said to herself; “only nineteen, and I will forget,” said her mind, “and I wish for Paul,” said her heart, which was like the ship’s engines—an essential part of movement and life.

“Hearts,” she said to the young man with anticipations, when he returned, “are only necessary to one’s being as the engines are to a steamer.”

She considered herself very wise.

“You are so young,” he answered, wondering why she should mention her heart.

Just then Mr. Archer appeared at the companion door to breathe the air. He was writing a paper on the intestines of salmon and grayling. The young man turned to him and said:

“Miss Archer compares our hearts to the engines.”

“A very good way,” murmured the father.

The young man left them and went to play poker; they were an unsuitable pair. Mr. Archer came over to Launa, who turned quickly to him.

“Father, I heard you talking to Mrs. Montmorency that day on the *Lethe*—about Mr. Harvey—was it true?”

Mr. Archer frowned.

“What did you hear?”

“Something about—a squaw and a child.”

“It was quite true about the squaw and the child,” he answered slowly.

“Ah!” she exclaimed with a little gasp. “Then a man can think of two women at the same time.”

Then he turned and looked at her.

“Men are very brutal.”

“You said he was thinking of marriage?”

“He is.”

She turned her face away from him, for his kind, penetrating look hurt her, and just then she needed him to be cross to her.

“Why do you ask me these questions, child?”

“Because it seemed so strange to me—I could not understand him.”

“Merely strange and not brutal? Nothing to you? Well, you hardly knew him, Launa.”

“Nothing to me,” she repeated, and her father returned to his writing.

The young man with anticipations saw his departure, and hastened to talk to Launa. He was singularly anxious to realise the pleasure of Miss Archer's society; she was quite original.

"You look pale," he said, with solicitude.

"Do I?"

"And worried. As if someone were dead."

"Some one is dead."

"Relations of yours? Cheer up. Wait until you get to London."

"And then?"

"Then? Oh, you can have a good time. You can have the best of good times in London—the very best—and forget everything disagreeable, too. I give you my word, it is just like morphia. When I am in a hole, and feel down on my luck, I go to town."

"Is that the fog? I think I should not like the after effect of morphia."

"Fog?" he asked. "No, it isn't fog, and yet it is fog, too; it deadens the brain. When someone threw me over, you bet I felt bad. I went up to town and forgot for a week. I did, really."

"A week! It lost its effect in a week, so quickly?"

"Well, she wrote then and forgave me, and *I* hadn't done anything wrong; *she* flirted. But she took me back, and I just licked her boots."

"But suppose she had not taken you back?"

"Then I should have lived and forgotten her; I'm hanged if I wouldn't," he said, with energy. "Life does it."

"Life?—you mean time."

"I mean living it down."

"But suppose you could not forget? Suppose you were so fond that you thought of her always?"

"I would forget. I mean—Well, I couldn't, you know," he said, and laughed. "Now I've got her, you see, and don't need to try. I do not mind telling you—you seem so interested, and are so sympathetic to-day—that I only forgot her when it was noisy and all that. But when I was alone and quiet—at night, you know—I was miserable. You have nothing like that to worry you, Miss Archer? It is very kind of you to take so much interest in my trouble. You won't think of your relations when you get to town. Are they in Canada?"

"Yes."

"And one died—a girl, I suppose? And the others want to interfere with you; they want you to be dull because they are? Relations always do that. Now, I have an aunt—she's a caution; she thinks I ought not to marry. But I would not stand that. Have you any aunts in town?"

"No. My father has a cousin; Mrs. Carden is her name."

"She won't bother you, I expect. You are lucky. Your father adores you. You have plenty of money, and are young. My Aunt Maria is a—Oh, the very deuce."

Here he launched forth into anecdotes of his relations, and Launa murmured a polite accompaniment to his reminiscences until the bell rang for dinner.

"We'll meet after dinner, won't we, and finish our talk? It's very jolly," he said. "You have such a nice voice, too."

"You have done me a great deal of good," she answered. "Time is all one wants."

"And life, amusement, and love," he added softly, with a glance at her, which, considering the state of his feelings for another lady, was unnecessarily kind.

"Leave out love," she answered. "I am hungry."

On deck after dinner when he looked for her she was not to be seen, so he concluded she was tired and had gone to bed, wherefore he played poker.

But Launa was not tired. She had hidden from him. His talks about his Aunt Maria had no interest for her, except when she regarded them as a narcotic, and then his musings were soothing. That evening she wanted to think and to be alone.

Her father had insisted on her drinking champagne at dinner. Mr. Archer said a voyage was exhausting, and he looked weary. He had not recovered from the surprise which his daughter's questions had produced. Were they caused merely by curiosity—the curiosity of an ignorant girl—or by interest? Curiosity is merely an inheritance from Eve; interest is the first instinct towards a man when a woman loves him or is going to love him.

"Launa must drink champagne to-night," he decided. "And soon we shall be in London. But why did she ask those curious questions?"

Launa took some cushions and rugs and went forward behind the boats. The steamer was surging on, the wind was rising, and the waves were breaking below with big white heads of foam. She began to think; she drew a picture of it all for herself in her mind and called herself a fool. Suppose Paul were there on the steamer, suppose he came to her with love in his eyes, and he were hers for the time—and that was it, that was what hurt—for the time, perhaps only for a time. Would she be willing to take him at the price of another woman's shame? And to know and to remember what was between her and him, like a bar, or a hand—the warm soft hand of a woman! No, it was over. She would shut up the book. Paul was dead, her Paul, the Paul she loved—she would think of him as she did of her dead mother—sometimes. But her mother was with the angels, and Paul was alive. She shivered a little; it was cold and damp, and the swirl of the waves as the steamer rushed through them was cruel.

She resolved to begin again, to rub out the writing of the first episode of life—such a new book to her—and to make the page ready for London and fresh impressions.

When the Archers arrived in London they took a flat near the Thames Embankment, and Launa revelled in new clothes, music, and horses. Her father soon had many friends. His wee world was exciting itself about the question of bones of fish, and he flung himself with ardour into the controversy.

After some days of continual absence on his part, and loneliness on Launa's, she went to him and said:—

“I want to know some women. I love nice women. Don’t you know some?”

He looked surprised.

“There is your cousin, Lavinia Carden; she lives in town. I will take you to see her. Her husband is dead; poor man, he never was happy. He yearned for the country and for pigs—Lavinia only appreciated bacon, and would not live out of Bayswater. A month at the seaside was all poor Carden got in the way of country.”

“I shall not like her.”

“She will give you good advice, Launa,” he said, laughing. “You don’t like that.”

Mrs. Carden lived in a semi-detached house, beyond Bayswater, far from the region of the fashionable, in the heart of cheap villadom, where twelve pennies had to make a little over a shilling. Endeavouring to save a farthing on one’s rolls or one’s fire-lighters is an absorbing occupation, and it seems to have most interest for those to whom it is immaterial whether they do save their farthing or not. Mrs. Carden had one son. When he was at home she saw what she considered life—an occasional visit to the theatre, or a dull dinner party, both reached with due propriety in a four-wheeler.

Mrs. Carden was a selfish woman, with a firm belief in her own opinions, and her own importance; anyone who contradicted her or disagreed with her was at once a detestable person. Her affection for her son was expressed in long letters, and the frequent use of “dearest.” But her love was variable, and when he was at home he disturbed her breakfasts, while her nights were made feverish by his late hours, which kept the hall gas a-light until sometimes past twelve o’clock. Her servants assumed a more frivolous demeanour on his arrival, and it seemed to her that while their caps were coquettishly crooked and smart, her stiff house became sometimes slightly untidy.

Charlie Carden was in a line regiment stationed at Malta, with one hundred and fifty pounds a year besides his pay. His mother wondered why he never became dashing, or soldier-like, or anything of a hero, with a sprinkling from the pepper-pot of wickedness—to possess this is the bounden duty of every man when he puts on a red coat or a sword. Carden remained dull, and his mother almost despised him; he was not even selfish, nor did he bully her.

George Archer and Lavinia Carden were second cousins, she was the only relation left whom he had known as a boy. His recollections of her were hazy. In these she figured as a muslin-fichued, sandy-haired girl, in whose face piety and cruelty struggled for mastery; now she parted her hair deliberately in the middle, and indulged in them both. In her youth she had regarded George as a possible husband, and, not loving him, had forgotten him, therefore when reminded of his existence she felt angry with him. Was it not his fault that she had married a man whose only inclinations were to have a farmyard, against which she had had to struggle all her life?

The day before the Archers went to 52 Lancaster Road a note was sent to Lavinia to prepare her for their visit. Mrs. Carden therefore left off her cap for the afternoon, braving the smile of her parlourmaid with the fortitude of a widow who has given up hope of a second marriage, and who suddenly finds the wonderful idea returning with unwonted sweetness—brought back to her by the visit of a man who was long ago considered a possibility. His fondness for a walk from church on Sunday evenings with her had more than proclaimed this fact. She forgot he had a daughter, and that it was five and twenty years since they had met.

The outside of Lavinia’s house was grey. Inside her drawing-room suggested the past and dust, which was constantly being removed; its mark was on the carpet, the walls and the furniture. Only the red blinds shed a little cheerful light, which the drab curtains chastened and subdued.

Mrs. Carden began by relating reminiscences of the family, and then pitied George Archer for his long residence among Colonists. He explained that his residence was quite voluntary, and that he regarded it as the happiest period of his life.

“Did you think my father was obliged to live in Canada whether he liked it or not?” asked Launa; “that he was suffering an unwilling exile?”

“Not exactly that,” said Mrs. Carden. “Where are you staying?”

When she heard of the flat, and contemplated Launa’s boots and dress, she murmured to herself, “Money.”

“George, sometimes when you are busy I should be so glad to take care of Launa; I would take her to—” She paused. Where could she take Launa? “We might go to the Zoo.”

“Thank you very much,” said Launa politely. She did not press Mrs. Carden to name the day for this expedition; she was not favourably impressed by her relative.

“You will come and dine with us, Mrs. Carden,” said Launa.

“Call me Lavinia,” said Mrs. Carden.

“Come any evening next week; which one will suit you?” asked Mr. Archer.

“Next Thursday,” answered Lavinia.

Then they talked of Mr. Archer’s old home, and looked at photographs of the whole of the family.

“Those happy days,” murmured Mrs. Carden, not without an uneasy feeling that her hair was growing thin at the parting; besides, she began to feel cold without her cap.

They drank weak tea, and Lavinia asked Launa her impressions of England.

“I think London is perfectly delightful,” she answered. “I don’t like the horses much. You use bearing reins. The river is quite perfect, and so different from ours. And yet sometimes I long for a stretch of rocky country, for more freedom. But the music and the life are so interesting. Yes, I love London.”

“Horses, river, life,” repeated Mrs. Carden.

A horse to her was a vehicle of locomotion, like an engine; it conveyed her to the station or to a party. Some deluded beings owned horses; she preferred hers hired, with no responsibility as to legs or grooms.

“You love boating and freedom,” remarked Mrs. Carden. “They are both often dangerous.”

“In this country, yes—where freedom frequently ends in trespassing,” answered Launa.

“Or worse—the loss of one’s reputation,” Lavinia said with decision.

Then she turned to George and told him anecdotes. She conversed rapidly and loudly; when she was a girl her family had told her she was arch.

When they rose to go she said: “George, my dear son will be at home in a few days. May I bring him to dine? Launa, he is your cousin.”

“Do bring him,” said Mr. Archer; “Launa will be glad to see him, I know.”

What a name—Launa! reflected Lavinia after their departure. What a fatality there is in our annexing the Colonies! Still, there is money behind the girl, and she is young.

By which reflection we may infer that Mrs. Carden thought of her son in connection with the money and Launa.

The Archers went home in a hansom.

“You call her a woman, daddy; now I call her a fossil,” said Launa. “She is not the sort of woman friend I need. I want a living woman—not one who has existed on husks until she withers everyone who goes near her.”

“She is a type,” he answered vacantly.

“She is an imitation. Show me some one who is brave—who has or knows life.”

“Would you like Mrs. Phillips to come and see you? She is Sir John Blomfield’s daughter, a widow and young. She wants to know you.”

“I am doubtful, not whether she will like me,” with sublime conceit, “but whether I shall like her.”

“You must try her,” he laughed.

His daughter amused him with her odd ideas.

However, when Mrs. Phillips did come, Launa approved of her.

All this time Launa was learning. She was filled with a desire to know and see more; people and life were so interesting. It was like a new play. She noticed how differently her father, herself, and the others were affected by it, and the noise was soothing, even at times deadening.

Launa found Mrs. Phillips entertaining. She explained some of the parts in this vast human drama. She found Miss Archer absurdly young in many of her notions, and absurdly old in others.

“I want to see everything,” said Launa, “and to live myself. It is terrible to feel oneself growing old. It will soon be over, and I haven’t done what I meant to do.”

Mrs. Phillips laughed.

“Go on. What did you mean to do?”

“I should like,” said Launa, “to be happy.”

“So should we all. Tell me more.”

“I want to play a little first, and then—to make the world a little brighter for someone.”

“If I were you, I would simply play myself and leave the others alone. Playing is real and not difficult. Once you begin to mix other people in your life, with your or their happiness depending on you, you will probably be very miserable.”

The admiration of one woman for another is sincere when it is felt when with her, and not merely expressed to a man.

Mrs. Phillips admired Launa for her youth, for her length of limb, and for her slight, graceful body and her warm brown skin. Launa’s mind was attractive. She made friends quickly; she seemed very adaptable; everyone interested her. Some men adored her as they had done at Musquodobit. To others, with a taste for sensuality, she was an indefinite slight girl, while to the few she was wholly desirable—madly desirable. Of course to the crowd she was just a girl.

Music exercised all its old fascination for her. She practised with diligence, and she listened greedily. It transported her to “Solitude,” to the wild sea there, to the rivers and lakes, the life which she loved and missed, which life and Paul she strove every day to forget. And in music she was with him. It was a dream life—she lived in it. Paul was dead to her, but for all that he existed sometimes. She was stared at in her canoe on the river, her paddling was so strong and vigorous, her body so lithe, her arms so round and firm as she took long, almost masculine, strokes, and nowhere did she miss Paul so much as she did there.

CHAPTER VI

The Cardens both went to dinner.

Captain Carden was a nondescript. He might have been attractive if he had ever appeared interested. He was tall, fair, with grey eyes, and very ugly hands, which were forced into notice because of his constant endeavour to hide them. Launa regarded mother and son with curiosity, for they were English and new, and reminded her of the characters in Trollope’s novels. Neither Charlie Carden nor his mother appeared to have found much to interest them in this world. They were ignorant as well as superior, and gloried in knowing nothing, unlike Mrs. Phillips’s friends, who were anxious to know everything, and to impress outsiders with their knowledge.

The Archers talked first about the opera. Mrs. Carden’s ideas of it were limited to “Pinafore” as new and “Martha” as old. German opera and Wagner were nothing to her, nor did she care about books.

Captain Carden talked about horses to Launa, who gathered that he fancied his own opinion as well as his own horses and prowess.

Mrs. Carden thought George should ask her to take the head of the table; she considered Launa too young. She was disappointed when she found the table was round.

Mrs. Phillips and Mr. Herbert were the other guests. Mr. Herbert was an ugly, short man, with a square face, and a stubbly black moustache. He was a journalist—besides which he was clever.

Shortly he was going to Canada to write articles for some papers on the country and its resources.

"You are going to write to me, too," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Yes," he replied, with a glance, full of—what?

Launa saw it; here was a man and a woman who clearly were of moment to each other. Launa was so absolutely ignorant of men; she knew only one man, and she tried to forget him. She had believed in them all as a class, and in their chivalrous respect for women—indefinite women—and in their everlasting love for one particular woman at last, but her belief was tottering.

That all men were brave she believed, too, it was part, an essential part, of her idea of a man, as all women are lovely and good. Of course she knew women existed with protruding teeth, who have no attraction, but men do not *love* them. Mrs. Carden she classed among them.

Captain Carden talked to her with assiduity. He told her he found London dull.

"I hate the people; they are so difficult to know. I have called over and over again on the Huntingdons. You know who he is? Lord Huntingdon in the War Office. And I go often to the club for billiards, but no one is friendly, and society is very difficult to get into."

"But do you not go in for something? Don't you ride, or row, or play golf? I think all men should care for things of that sort, even for making love."

"I never make love; that means marriage, and I have no money."

"Do you ride?" she asked, feeling perfectly indifferent as to his reply. "All soldiers do."

This conversation was so profoundly insipid.

"Sometimes; but I hate it. I am always afraid of falling off. I go in for it because the regiment would not think much of me if I didn't. But I hope I have not bored you," with a sudden change of tone. "We are cousins, you know, and it is so funny how intimate I can be with you; there are so few women I like, or with whom I can be confidential."

Launa ate an almond with deliberation.

"Perhaps some day you will come for a drive with me. I might hire a safe horse."

"Oh, no, thank you. Please do not trouble, I do not like safe horses."

Mr. Archer turned to Captain Carden and asked about Malta, and Launa watched Mrs. Phillips, who was talking very little, while Mr. Herbert's conversation was incessant. His air was persuasive, his eyes eager, ardent, full of desire.

At ten the Cardens departed. Charley Carden had time to assure Launa again that she was the only woman with whom he could be confidential. Mrs. Phillips was to stay the night. Launa and she had bedrooms adjoining, with a door of communication. They both put on dressing-gowns, and Lily Phillips went into Launa's room.

"You are not sleepy, are you? Shall we talk?"

"Sit here," said Launa, "in this comfortable chair."

There was a small fire.

"I am always cold," said Launa. "I love a fire."

"What do you think of Mr. Herbert?"

"I think him clever, and he evidently likes you."

"Yes, he is clever. But tell me, Launa, are you modern?"

"In what way?"

"Would you ask a man who loved you if he had a past? Would you object to it if he had?"

"If a past were a present I would object. Can't men be without past? Is there always a woman they have loved first?"

She seemed to hear the wailing of a child and the rustling of the trees, and to feel the fresh breeze. She shuddered. Mrs. Phillips observed the shudder and the look.

"I do not object. Men are different; they are coarse. They like kissing—indiscriminate kissing."

Launa laughed, and said, "Go on."

"If I love a man I shall not care what he has—past, present, anything, if he loves me. I would like one man to really love me."

"You have been married," suggested Launa.

"But not loved. My husband was nice; we never quarrelled, but we never made it up. Nice men do not love women; they ask us to marry them, to be mothers to their children. Devils love us and often leave us."

For some time there was silence.

"You like Mr. Herbert?" again asked Mrs. Phillips.

"He wants to marry you," said Launa.

"He thinks he does. I am afraid of marriage. I am four-and-twenty and I feel fifty; he is thirty and seems twenty."

"If I were a man," said Launa, "I would love you. You are not merely beautiful; you are more—not only attractive, you will never grow old."

"Thank you, dear," said Mrs. Phillips; "that is a compliment."

Mrs. Phillips was small and slight; her hair was a very dark brown, her lips were red, her eyes large and dark blue. Her mouth was the most beautiful part of her face. Her fascination was great; men loved her, went mad over her, and loved her still. She was not good-tempered; a man would never have chosen her for his friend merely. She was variable; not the least of her attraction was that men never could tell how she would treat them. Some women lose their power by their variableness; Mrs. Phillips gained hers. She was cold, yet she could have been passionately fond; but she worshipped self-control, and considered a man ceases to care for a woman when once he is sure of her.

"I shall marry him," she said. "I think I shall. He is not poor, but I shall never live with him."

"Why not? What will you do?"

"Though he cares for me, he will grow tired of marriage, and so shall I. The accessibility of a wife is so dull. I shall live in my own flat, and he can keep his rooms. Our marriage notice in all the papers will be followed by a week's honeymoon, and then he can go back to his work, and I can

play. He must love me better for not being sure of me at breakfast, weary of me at dinner, and asleep in the drawing-room at night. All the attraction of the—" she paused—"of the others will be mine. I shall be his wife. We can entertain, and he will be sure of me."

"Do men always grow tired of us?" asked Launa, "even if or when they love us?"

"Not always tired, but secure. If they were merely tired, they would let us alone. They cease to desire to please us; we belong to them. Ah, my dear, love! do men love us? Yes, they love us, but do they love one woman?"

Launa's clock struck twelve.

"I must go to bed," said Lily Phillips. "I shall not kiss you. Women should never kiss each other. Good-night."

"Good-night," repeated Launa.

"That Carden man will want to marry you, Launa. Beware of them both. He is a worm, and has awful legs!"

A few nights after this, Mrs. Phillips took Launa to a ball given by some bachelors—eligible, delightful young men—whose reputation for wickedness was wholly obliterated by their fortunes or the want thereof.

Captain Carden was there. He had procured his invitation with great difficulty. The mother of one bachelor had cause for gratitude towards him. Her son was in his regiment, and when his reputation promised to become inconveniently large, Captain Carden for once used his wits, saved him from the consequences thereof, and the family felt they owed Captain Carden something. Mrs. Carden rejoiced. She thanked Providence for having delivered the sons of the enemy into her hand, and piously glanced at the ceiling (where a brass chandelier hung, symbolic of the worship of light, also brass) when Charlie related his success. He disliked Mrs. Phillips. She circumvented him by introducing several men to Launa before Captain Carden could demand more dances than he had a right to expect. But then she could give him only two.

"Mr. George will amuse you, dear," said Mrs. Phillips to Launa. "He is clever, and will tell you about his books."

Mr. George appeared young, and looked not more than two-and-twenty. He was tall, with a pink and white skin, yellow hair, and an infantile smile. He seemed to have vacated the pinafores of the nursery only the day before; but this was not the case, for he had really left them long ago, and he was thirty years old. He told Miss Archer he was writing a book.

"About what? Is it a novel?" she asked.

"About Beginnings," he replied; "they are so neglected. Everyone writes about Pasts and Probable Futures, but Beginnings are so interesting. The first love-making is a joy, afterwards it palls. The Beginning—the doubt of how she will take it, and how one can make it—is rapture."

"You think there is joy in uncertainty?" she said.

"I do," he replied.

"But when men love, they—"

George interrupted her.

"Dear Miss Archer, I have taken to you at once. I notice you do not use that detestable expression 'in love.' This is our Beginning. You were saying—?"

"I was going to say, when men love they are never happy until they discover whether she loves them in return; uncertainty gives them no joy."

"It does, they *think* it does not. That is just what I want to illustrate; when a man does know it, and she does love him, then he marries her, he is certain of her. He may become resigned, but he is not happy, and then—"

"Yes, and then?"

"He is forever dissatisfied."

"I thought women only were dissatisfied."

"Men are, too," said Mr. George; "I want to show the unhappiness of certainty. I know it."

"This is our dance, Launa," said Captain Carden, standing before her and endeavouring to show his proprietorship.

She did not rise. She looked at him and resented his calling her "Launa" as he did. He was not her friend. She disliked him. His jerky manner and his shifty eyes repelled her.

"Launa," murmured Mr. George, "your name? and it was surely not given by your godfathers and godmothers?"

"Our dance," said Captain Carden again.

"I will tell you about my name," she said, "by and by."

The band was playing a waltz. In spite of herself she felt gay, inspirited. To Captain Carden it was as all other waltzes. He was tired of dancing with young ladies who bored him, and equally weary of ladies who plainly showed they thought him not worthy of a look or a word.

Launa came as a change and a relief. She had intense vitality and energy; a waltz always affected her; it made her glad or sad. She loved the music, the motion, and she looked so desirable.

Captain Carden was not sure whether she was beautiful or not. He wanted to hear someone else say it; he distrusted his own opinion; he had no self-confidence. She was eligible, virtue of virtues; he was a man, she a woman, and as such glad to get him. Did a woman ever refuse a man with his advantages? Never.

Dancing gave Launa more colour. She waltzed several times round the room with him. He danced badly, and held her too close. They stopped. Her hair was ruffled. She stood near him, and he longed to possess her, to own her, to kiss her until she was breathless. His eyes shone as he looked at her. How he would reform her. She would long for his words; she would yearn for his caresses.

"Isn't that a reviving waltz?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied almost impulsively.

Her presence was reviving, not the music. After this she danced with Mr. George, and explained

her captivating name to him. He said he adored it.

"As a Beginning," she suggested.

"Yes," he answered instantly.

Then he asked leave to call upon her father to explain his recently published book of Proverbs. He offered to bring a copy with him, and she accepted his offer, for he greatly amused her.

She met another man, called Wainbridge. He also expressed his intention of calling at Victoria Mansions. He called himself a musician, though he did not play any instrument; she promised to play for him.

"He will be Lord Wainbridge some day," said Mrs. Phillips, as they drove home together. "His uncle has no children by this wife. If she were to die!" Lily Phillips shuddered, "there is another, a young woman with sons."

"He must be a beast," said Launa.

"No, not necessarily, only a victim to circumstances, and she is very pretty. I think Mr. Wainbridge knows her. Lady Wainbridge is a horror; she is a Plymouth sister, and wears bombazine always, and a front. She was only evangelical when he married her, and he considered she possessed the possibilities of the good wife, and he expected an heir. He has suffered intensely."

"Rubbish," said Launa, "the other woman suffers."

"You may be sure he has settled all he can on her," said Lily Phillips, "for I suppose she does suffer, principally because she is not his wife. I often wish I knew her. I wonder if she feels wicked. It would be interesting to know any one living on a volcano, as she does. His wife might die, he might marry a young and innocent girl. Men like their wives to be ignorant of their vices and peculiar passions until after marriage—then—Well, good-night. It was a very cheery ball. You liked it?"

"Immensely," answered Launa.

"You are very young, Launa. You think men love once. You would not care for a man who could love you and kiss another woman?"

"He could not love me then."

"My dear, men are different. There is passion and love, and not always felt for the same woman. Love and passion last; passion alone—Bah! it is nothing."

"Nothing," repeated Launa.

"It is an impulse; it goes, and they love you again."

Some days after the ball they were all at tea at Mrs. Phillips's—Mr. Wainbridge, Launa, Mr. George, and others. The two men had already called on Mr. Archer, and had been invited to dine.

"I want above all things in the world," said Launa slowly, "to drive a hansom, to sit up high and see the world."

"I bet you five pounds you can't," said Mr. George. "I beg your pardon. But I am sure you can't."

She laughed. "I will."

"How will you climb up?" asked Mrs. Phillips.

"Easily. I will do it at night."

"And drive me," Mr. George said. "I will pay you. Don't overcharge."

"Take me too," said Mr. Wainbridge.

"You may both come," answered Launa gaily.

"You must all dine here to-morrow night," said Lily Phillips. "Launa, make your arrangements, and get it over."

It was after dinner. Launa and Mr. George had been delightful. Mr. Wainbridge was suffering from his feelings for her; he could not be frivolous. The carriage came for Miss Archer, who sent it away.

"Come," she said. "Good-night, Lily, I am going to drive. Jacobs got me a hansom, and has arranged it all for me. Do hurry," she said to Mr. George. "I feel so excited."

She put on a long driving coat, a little cap, and a very large silk handkerchief, which went round her neck, and covered the lower part of her face completely.

Mrs. Phillips came out to the door.

"We can't start here," said Launa; "the hansom is in a narrow street close by."

They found it waiting just round the corner.

"Get in quickly," she said.

"I won't," said Mr. Wainbridge, "until you are up. Don't do it. I wish you wouldn't."

"Rubbish," she replied. "I am going by the back streets. I know the way, so does the mare. I am driving Nell, you know."

She climbed up and arranged the rugs.

"It is splendid, it gives one such a grip. Let her go."

They dashed off with a clatter. The mare evidently was pulling.

"I never thought she would do it," said Mr. George.

"I wish to Heaven she had not tried," said the other.

"Get out, then," said Mr. George. "Shall I stop her?"

"No! If she is killed, I'll be killed too!"

Mr. George laughed quietly with intense enjoyment. They drove through dark streets. Launa had been coached by Jacobs which way to go. In one place where it was brightly lighted there was a public-house and a policeman. She drove slowly. Mr. Wainbridge glanced with apprehension at the stalwart supporter of law.

Then they turned a corner, and stopped in front of Victoria Mansions. Jacobs was waiting. Launa got down.

"It was perfectly celestial," she said. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

"Nor I," said Mr. George, "though I owe you five pounds. There is something romantic in being driven by a woman, and that woman you, and you drive so well. I am callous when I remember that five pounds, though I was alarmed about you."

“Of course I would not take it,” she said.

Mr. Wainbridge looked white. He helped her to take off her coat.

“You will never do it again,” he said. “Promise—never.”

She laughed softly.

“I shall do it perhaps if I want to.”

“Only with me.”

The tone was beseeching.

“No, no, with anyone I choose.”

After they left, Launa went into her father’s work-room.

“I drove to-night,” she said. “Mr. George and Mr. Wainbridge came in the hansom, and I drove it.”

“You drove a hansom cab?”

“Yes, I feel very proud, so don’t tell me I ought not to be.”

“You should be ashamed, and I must scold you.”

“Ah, no. You are a dear.”

“Was it a successful party? You like Mrs. Phillips?”

“I like her very much. . . . Do men love women—often?”

Her father looked at her, but it was evidently a problem question, not as it affected herself, but others.

“Yes,” he replied.

“They talk so much about it.”

“I suppose so. You have . . . no theories, no experience, I suppose?”

“No, I think a man in love must be rather a bore. Good-night, I am very sleepy.”

“Don’t drive any more hansoms, Launa.”

“Very well, father, I won’t.”

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Archer had gone on a trip to Norway.

Mrs. Phillips was at Marlow with some friends, Mr. Herbert was there also.

Mrs. Phillips had written to Launa telling her the new shirts were becoming and the new punt a success. From this Launa gathered that Mr. Herbert, as well as the punt, was agreeable. Lily had too much experience to give in to his supplications at once, or to agree with him that love was of any avail in life. She said marriage rhymed with carriage very properly, and love with nothing. Besides, she was aware that after a woman has said “I love you” frequently there is nothing left to say.

Launa was all alone.

This particular afternoon she had arrayed herself in a wonderful tea-gown—a combination of Greece and Paris with flashes of audacity thrown in, green and cream and gold—it was loose where it is pretty to be loose, and tight where it showed the curves of her figure.

She was playing to herself—Chopin and Wagner. Her wrists had gained in strength, her tone in volume, and her mind—that, too, had gained in experience and insight. The world was opening to her—undreamt of possibilities intruded sometimes—but Lily’s ideas of taking the goods the gods give to-day while never thinking of to-morrow, were attractive. Yet Launa could not forget Paul; in her heart she believed in the future “Goldene Zeit” which *must* come.

It was impossible for her to realise that she could not command fate—destiny. She had assumed the command once, that day with Paul, and now she regretted it. She could not write to him; everything was against that, and if he were to come over, as she often hoped he would, how much better would it be? The Indian girl came between them. She knew her father would never consent to any marriage between herself and Paul. Launa had cultivated an ideal of women’s behaviour to other women; they should always support the wronged woman, even when it means losing a hearts desire. Until it meant losing her own heart’s desire she had derived much joy from this theory, now she realised that no one can be happy on a theory.

She played a Chopin study: relentless fate—a chilling, creeping fiend of Impossibility—went through it, which mocked the delusive sound of far-away joy and happiness somewhere—the indefinite somewhere.

She heard a faint rustle of a *portière* behind her, but she played on. When it was over she put her head in her hands, then let her hands fall with a crash upon the keys. The sound expressed her feelings, the discord was a relief.

“How do you do?” said some one softly behind her.

She started and turned round to see Mr. Wainbridge. There were tears in her eyes enough to soften them as she looked up at him. She did not rise hurriedly, or look startled as the majority of women would have done, but held out her hand, which he took.

“Shall I go away?” he asked. He admired every detail of her appearance, and the look in her eyes surprised him. “You would like to be alone and I cannot bear to leave you,” he said slowly, while still holding her hand.

His expression and intonation were not lost on her—they meant power in herself; he could not leave her; and the desire of power comes after love in the aspirations of some women.

“No, stay,” she said. “Sit down.”

He chose a chair near her and the silence was restful—most women consider it fatal. He had begun to compare her with other women.

“You heard my discord?”

“I heard it,” he replied.

“And interpreted it?”

“No, I cannot say that.”

“I will play to you,” she said, rising with a quick litheness which reminded him of a serpent.

She played Liszt’s arrangement of Mendelssohn’s “Auf Flügeln des Gesanges.”

“Thank you; I have enjoyed it intensely,” he said, when she had finished. “ ‘Thank you’ is poor—it cannot express my meaning. You play magnificently.”

“I am glad you think so,” she replied. “When you came I was wishing I could do nothing. You understand? To acquiesce is happiness if one knows no better.”

“But if one does know? Believe me, acquiescence is misery. The wings of song carried you somewhere far away?”

“How do you know?” she asked suddenly. “To fight, to be, and to do, are the best.”

“Like our childish friend the verb; you have left out to suffer,” he suggested softly.

She laughed, and he felt baffled.

“Let us go and have tea.”

“On the principle of feed a man when he bores you,” Mr. Wainbridge said with irritation.

“No, not at all. I love my tea, and it will be cold. Tell me first how you like my music-room? It is my own particular abode; you were admitted by mistake.”

“May I be admitted again?”

“Perhaps—tell me about my room?”

He had forgotten to look at the surroundings. The room was long, and rather high—the walls were a dull rich cream colour; quantities of flowers were arranged everywhere, principally irises with their long leaves, in immense dull brown jars. Standing near the piano was a eucalyptus tree, its dull grey-green leaves hung over Launa. Green, brown, and cream were the colours in the room, with red here and there—the warm red of autumn leaves.

“The room suits you,” he replied.

Mr. Wainbridge found personal conversation was over with the change of room. She talked of the last new book, and of bicycling. He made himself agreeable. He was a prudent young man, and well received everywhere; plain daughters of dukes and marquises were glad to talk to him—he was a Possibility; there was a doubt owing to his uncle and the Plymouth Sister. There was a legend about Mr. Wainbridge that he once had loved someone of the lower classes—the someone was indefinite—it was supposed she had died or married. Some people gave Mr. Wainbridge credit for the virtue of forsaking her.

They had finished tea when Mr. George was announced. He had a large book with him. It was his own book of proverbs, and he brought it to present to Launa.

“Precept is better than example,” he began. “Don’t you think so, Wainbridge? I always have set a good example, but—”

“Mrs. Carden,” said the maid, and the rest of Mr. George’s sentence was lost in the rustle of that lady’s entrance.

She was arrayed principally in bugles. She looked war-like, and as if she might suddenly sound the call to battle on one of her ornaments.

Launa introduced the men to her. Mrs. Carden accepted tea, and observed that George was away.

“I am here,” whispered Mr. George softly. “Does she want me?”

Launa frowned at him.

“Yes,” she replied; “he is in Norway. I heard from him to-day.”

“I am sure Mrs. Carden will agree with me,” said Mr. George agreeably, “about proverbs. Precept *is* better than example. Miss Launa, your father plainly thinks so. He is away enjoying himself. He sets you a bad example, but his precepts are excellent. My edition of the proverbs is so convincing.”

Mrs. Carden gazed at him, her cake in her hand half-way to her mouth, which was open.

“Is it really precept is better than example? Did Solomon say it? I only know his proverbs. I brought my son up on them.”

She was rather at sea as to Mr. George’s position, he seemed so self-assured and so moral. Could he be the head of a new sect, or the editor of a paper?

“Solomon says, ‘The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb,’ ” said Mrs. Carden. “He is a very wise man.”

“That is not a mere precept,” said Mr. Wainbridge softly. “He said it from experience.”

“Solomon’s example was variable,” said George.

“But he was very wise,” observed Mrs. Carden.

“Very,” said George solemnly. “Precept is better than example.”

“What?” she asked, “surely you have made a mistake, and the true version is ‘example is better than precept.’ ”

She wore an air of triumph, and glanced proudly round her.

“Mr. George is writing a book,” said Launa, “on proverbs. He is—”

“Correcting the faults of the world,” said Mr. George, humbly.

“A necessary task,” said Mrs. Carden, “in these degenerate days. Mr. M^{c}Carthy, who preaches at St. Luke’s, Launa (I advise you to go and hear him), is a son of Dr. Willis, in the faith—”

“What a good name. I did not know that was what they called it,” said Mr. George softly; “but add in love—in faith and love.”

“Miss Archer was playing to me,” said Mr. Wainbridge. “Have you heard her?”

He addressed his question to Mrs. Carden, who appeared perturbed.

“No. I am sure she can play. But I dislike music excessively. I played myself once; and my son

has a flute. I find it disturbing."

"There is so much wind needed for the flute," said Mr. George. "It is an instrument which reminds one of a hurricane."

"I love a penny whistle," said Launa. "I can play 'Honey, my honey,' on mine."

"Play it now," said Mr. George. "Please, Miss Archer. I really cannot call you Miss Archer any longer. Miss Launa is so much prettier; and Launa is the prettiest name in the world."

"You may call me Launa if you like. I never was called Miss Archer as much as I have been since I came to England. I will play the penny whistle for you some day. Mrs. Carden would not like it now."

"Pray do not mind me; I must go. I am always at home at half-past five; I dine at six. I came, my dear Launa, to ask you to come and spend a few quiet days with me while your father is away. Charlie is also away."

"Thank you. It is very kind of you to think of me," replied Launa. "I cannot come and stay, for I promised my father I would not leave the flat just now. You see all our servants are new, and he would not like me to leave them alone."

"How terrible if they danced in your music room," said Mr. Wainbridge, with a smile.

"Terrible," said Launa.

"There is no reason why we should not dance there," observed Mr. George. "Example! precept! Let us dance."

"I think, Launa, it would be much better for you to come to the shelter of an English home, during the time of your father's absence. It is not proper for you to remain here alone."

"I prefer a Canadian shelter," said Launa, with sweetness.

"Are you having music lessons, dear Launa?" asked Mrs. Carden. "And have you taken up any serious study, yet?"

"I go to Herr Winderthal's twice a week and play for him, and with him. He has two other men for the violin and the 'cello; we play trios and quartettes. You know the quartette with 'Die Forelle,' motif by Schubert?"

"Alone?" inquired Mrs. Carden, with apprehension.

"Alone? No. Three people play in a trio, and four in a quartette," said Launa.

Mr. George laughed, and said:—

"No one will listen to me. And I do so want to explain my proverb to you, Miss Launa. You see, if a woman has a brutal temper she does absolutely as she likes, and never sets an example; her precepts are obeyed, she has a good time, the best; and you see a saint whose example is quite heavenly, does any one imitate her? No, they only make her do more, work harder, and set a better example. Then they admire her."

"You have met that woman?" said Mr. Wainbridge.

"Several of them," said the other.

"Good-bye," began Mrs. Carden. "I am disappointed in you, Launa."

Launa did not inquire the reason of her disappointment, but shook hands with her, accompanying her to the door, followed by the two men.

"Come to me when you are in difficulties," said Mrs. Carden. "Your housemaids—"

She waved her parasol as the lift bore her down, and went home in a state of agitation; for in the future Launa would have great possessions, and the Carden exchequer was low. Could it be that the young man with the proverbs had discovered this? That he would desire Launa?

She resolved to invite herself to lunch with Launa the next Sunday, and to make Charlie call the day of his return.

CHAPTER VIII

Mrs. Carden drove home in a hansom, a strange and unusual extravagance. At Launa's she had been bewildered—the conversation was so difficult to understand, so full of proverbs and of Solomon.

In the hansom Mrs. Carden would think well. She turned the situation over in her mind and stopped at a telegraph office to send Charlie a telegram. He was fishing with some uninteresting cousins in Kent. Mrs. Carden sent for her friend and confidante, Miss Sims. Miss Sims had been fat, she now was thin, and weighed only seven stone—she gloried in thin arms and a scraggy neck, and told everybody about herself in a sad voice. It is better to be poor and lean than poor and fat, the rich ask one to dine more frequently.

Mrs. Carden told her lean friend as much of the subject as was necessary for her to know.

Mrs. Carden's principles were good—on principle. She was firmly persuaded that Charlie was deeply, virginly in love with Launa, and that Launa was wandering—was being attracted by strange men who talked of books and pianos with intimacy, and of proverbs. At first she had an idea that Mr. George was a leader of some kind. From the sheltered seclusion of beyond Bayswater she had read the papers, and had heard that at one fashionable church the clergyman lectured on dress in the pulpit, while his wife wore a becoming cassock in the chancel. Miss Sims and Mrs. Carden took counsel together, and the result thereof was that Charlie loved Launa, and Launa must see the advantage of such affection.

Mrs. Carden sent Launa a post-card, saying she would go to lunch the next Sunday at two o'clock. If Launa was obliged to go out, she must leave lunch for her relative, and empty rooms—Mrs. Carden adored rooms without their owners.

Mrs. Phillips was still staying at Marlow; Mr. Herbert, too, was there. She was in the uncomfortable situation of indecision; he in an equally uncomfortable one. He had made up his

mind, but a solitary mind which has determined on its own course of action is weariness, because for happiness it requires the acquiescence of the other person, and Lily would not agree that what would make him happy would necessarily make her so.

Her doubt had not spoiled her appetite, the arrangement of her neckties, nor any one of those details to which a well-dressed woman is always attentive, but it did spoil the sunshine and the river; the wind in the rushes made her shiver, and the backwaters were lonely and too convenient for episodes. The locks and people were delightful; the puffing of steam launches was a sound of joy. She took to rowing, and suffered tortures afterwards from stiff arms and a stiffer back. When she did not row, Mr. Herbert did; she sat in the stern and discoursed to him, and he enjoyed her conversation. The boat was delightful: it was quite cranky, and neither person dared to move about; conversation with three yards between them must be of the day and not of the feelings, or if feelings are mentioned, one means those delightful, unexplainable sensations which are merely useful as subjects of conversation, and do not agitate one sufficiently to make one uncomfortable.

At the end of a month Mrs. Phillips went up to Paddington. Mr. Herbert accompanied her; they sat in opposite corners of the carriage, and she read the *Lady's Pictorial* while he smoked. At Paddington they parted, and she drove to Victoria Mansions to stay with Launa.

Mr. Wainbridge was there, and they were having tea. Mrs. Phillips found it cool and restful, and the sensation of being not the first and only woman was novel and possessed a reposeful charm. They were arguing about music, and the room was full of flowers.

When Launa received Mrs. Carden's post-card she threw it to her friend Lily.

"There," she said.

Mrs. Phillips groaned.

"I cannot endure that woman. Who are you having to lunch as well?"

"Mr. Herbert, Mr. Wainbridge, you and I."

"Shall I ask papa? He is so cheerful."

"Do, if you think he will not be bored."

"My dear, he admires you immensely."

Sir John Bloomfield was a cheerful old gentleman; he took this world as it treated him, and that was well. He had been married twice. The second lady, Lily's stepmother, had money, and did not live long. She had taken life seriously, and it killed her. Sir John's curly hair was white, and also his moustache; he wore his hat with a gentle incline to one side of his head. It gave him a rakish air of joviality; he affected the society of young married women, all except his daughters—he took no interest in either of them. He came to lunch on Sunday, fresh from a stroll with a delightful young woman, after an hour's contemplation of the smartest bonnets in church, and having listened to the cleverest preacher in London, whose sermons lasted ten minutes only. He was a brilliant man.

They were all in the drawing-room when Mrs. Carden rustled in.

Sir John attached himself to Launa as he objected to elderly ladies, because they were so apt to take it for granted that his opinions were like theirs—middle-aged—and Sir John was quite modern.

At lunch Mrs. Carden sat between Mr. Herbert and Sir John, who devoted himself to Launa. There was another reason to account for his youthful air—he had not the gluttonous enjoyment of food the middle-aged and old acquire.

Mr. Herbert was absorbed in his lunch. Mrs. Carden began to talk. She was hungry, but the waves of Sir John's anecdotes threatened to engulf her and to reduce her to silence.

She talked of music halls and of morality. In those days both were subjects of conversation and of argument.

"I hate morality," said Launa. "It means nothing. It is only a name. Maud is so fond of talking of it. Maud is very vulgar."

Mrs. Carden pushed away her plate with impatience. She ate the pudding afterwards, for it was excellent. She was horrified.

Sir John helped himself to cream with deliberation. Mr. Wainbridge looked at Launa. Mrs. Phillips saw the look and interpreted it.

"My dear Miss Archer," said Sir John, "the world is very hard; its rules are firm and not easily broken."

"I do not agree with you," said Mrs. Carden. "They are broken with impunity very easily."

"Probably you do not agree with me," said Sir John. "I haven't tried to break any. I do not speak from experience."

"The world does not mind its rules being broken," said Mrs. Phillips. "It minds only when it discovers the hole and is obliged to notice it."

"There are saints to whom the good people would not, could not speak," said Sir John.

"Purity and morality are often mistaken," said Launa, "by the world. It is unjust, and justice is cruelty."

"It is law," observed Mr. Wainbridge, with a sigh.

"Law and the promises," said Sir John.

"Prophets," corrected Mrs. Carden.

"Promises are interesting," he continued, talking rapidly because he knew he had made a mistake. "A man should always keep a promise."

"No," said Launa.

"Yes," said Mr. Wainbridge.

"I would rather hear the truth," said Launa, "even if it hurt. One moment's pain would be better than days of regret."

Mrs. Carden shook her head and waved her hands. Pantomime was her only resource.

Sir John assumed his spritely air.

"We are too sad; we are discussing such uninteresting subjects. No man ever breaks a promise to such charming ladies as there are here. Lily, tell us about your river adventures."

"Ask Jack."

Mr. Herbert smiled.

"We went out in the boat every day—Lily rowed occasionally and I rowed frequently. We disagreed on various subjects every day, on the marriage question and on—on—"

"On what?" said Launa.

"On that—"

They laughed together.

"What is 'that'?" said Mrs. Carden.

"A preposition," answered Mr. Herbert shortly.

"Oh, no," said Lily, "it's a pronoun."

" 'That' is an adverb," said Mrs. Carden. "Launa, I shall tell Maud that you called her—vulgar."

"Oh! do."

"Women always tell," said Mr. Herbert. "I told a woman something once and she told. She—"

"I am not a woman," said Mrs. Carden, "who carries tales."

"But you are going to tell someone what Miss Archer said of her," observed Mr. Herbert. "Men don't do that."

"Ah!"

"Nobody tells, really."

"*I* did not tell, Jack," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Tell us now," said Sir John. "If you get the credit of telling we may as well derive some amusement from the story. Miss Archer, what do men usually tell you."

"Different things. They do not confide in me. I am not sympathetic enough."

"Are you not?" inquired Mr. Wainbridge. "I think you are. I should love to confide in you."

He looked again at her, so did Mr. Herbert, and Lily observing both looks concerned herself with Mr. Herbert's, which was one of admiration—developing admiration.

It was then that marriage with him appeared desirable, or rather the owning of him would be pleasant. Mrs. Phillips imagined her wedding and the wedding dress! He could admire another woman!

They got up from the table, and Mrs. Phillips stayed with the men to smoke. After his cigarette Sir John went to the Club. Mrs. Carden seated herself on a sofa and demanded a footstool, then when Launa announced an engagement for the afternoon, Lavinia arose and took her departure. Launa and Mr. Wainbridge drove off in a hansom.

"Do you think they are really going to hear music?" asked Mr. Herbert, when Lily and he were alone.

"Why not?"

"Because it is so hot, and because *I* would much rather talk to you here, so I naturally suppose every other man would rather talk to the woman he loves than listen to any music. I have made up my mind to marry you in a month."

She smiled enigmatically.

"Very well. You know my bargain. I cannot live with my sister; she swamps me. Her mind and her life are like a bog. It is dull living alone; you would provide an element of excitement."

"You say marriage is not love. Is it exciting?" he asked.

"A husband should be reviving," she answered, "and should endeavour to be—a lover—always."

Mr. Herbert came over to her.

"I shall always be your lover."

"And you agree to my conditions?"

"You are to keep your rooms; I am to keep mine. Is that it?"

"Yes. What else?"

"We are seldom to have breakfast together."

"Very seldom," she answered.

"After our honeymoon?"

"After our—after that—yes," she said.

"But dinner always."

"Dinner often," she corrected.

"Take off your rings," he said.

Mrs. Phillips frowned.

"You are too commanding."

"Please."

"You do it," and she held out her hand.

He gravely pulled off first one with two large turquoises—he had given it to her—next a small one with a diamond, then her wedding ring which he put in his pocket, and replaced it with one almost exactly like it.

"With my body I thee worship," he said, and he added a ring with three large sapphires in a light gold setting. The stones were set high and they shone.

"You do not wear his ring now."

"How beautiful the stones are," she answered.

"I have always been jealous of that ring," he said.

"Have you? 'Jealousy is as cruel as the grave,' saith Solomon. Do not be cruel."

"I could not be anything with you but kind," he replied, with a sort of unsteadiness, for though she was not lovely she was alluring, fascinating. He could have followed her away from everything, through disasters and fire without feeling it, until she left him.

"The honeymoon was invented for Adam and Eve before the Fall," she said slowly, "and before the appearance of the serpent. Is there necessarily a serpent now?"

"You spoil everything by analysing it," he replied. "You should look on things as a whole, and not dissect them; that is one of your own maxims. You told it to me when I asked of what your new hat was made. You said it was a whole and a creation."

“But honeymoons are not wholes, nor are emotions. Everything is largely constituted of them.”

“They are moments. Live for one moment.”

“It passes so quickly,” she said, and sighed.

“Then, in a month,” he suggested, with an outward air of boldness, though inwardly he was doubtful and quaking, “you will marry me.”

“In a month! How soon!”

“How far away. Where shall we go for our tour?”

“Not to Paris. I hate Paris.”

“Shall we stay in London?”

“No, no! How commonplace! We shall live in London. Suggest something new.”

“Shall we go into the country? To the real country, where there are nightingales and roses?”

She sang softly:

> “The nightingale in fervent song
> Doth woo the rose the whole night long.”

“Rubinstein, isn’t it?” he asked. “Well, will you come?”

“Yes, it is risky, but I will for once hear the nightingales and feel young again.”

“I love you.”

“Do you? Love—it is so old, so new, so impossible.”

“For always,” he said, not answering her, only following the train of thought in his own mind.

“No, not for always,” she said sadly, “Love me really for a week, a day, a year—while the nightingales sing. I would rather have a man’s whole love for *one* day, than his toleration for years, his agreeable acceptation of my presence.”

“A man usually loves his wife.”

“Does he? Does he? You know that is rubbish. You love me now, and you think you will always. A wife is associated with a man’s disagreeable pleasures, his duty dinners, his dull breakfasts. When he goes to dine at his Colonel’s, or with the man who has influence, and runs the papers, she goes and bores him too. If you were compelled to take the other man’s wife out to dinner you would appreciate the attributes of your own when you returned to her.”

“A man loves his future wife before matrimony. But, Lily, afterwards I think it is your own fault.”

“Mine?” she exclaimed. “Mine—you forget—you—”

“Dearest, I did not mean you. I meant indefinite woman. It will never be your fault.”

She looked at him.

“You apologised in time—I was haughty. Sit there, near, but not too near me.”

He seated himself in a little chair.

“That chair will break. Sit somewhere else.”

“To return to the subject of matrimony,” she said.

“Of breakfast.”

“A woman lets her husband see too much of her, and know too much about her. She frequently looks ugly. Oh, Dr. Jaegar, thou art answerable for much woe! Breakfast is a disturbing meal, for we sometimes are weary at breakfast and—you may have yours alone.”

“I would like it better with you.”

“That is it,” she exclaimed. “Now you would. Soon you would not. You must make a man do without what he loves, to keep his love. Men are so unreasonable.”

“Do you believe in anyone, Lily?”

“No. Yes, I do.”

“Tell me,” he asked eagerly, “in whom do you believe?”

“In myself.”

CHAPTER IX

Launa and Mr. Wainbridge drove to the concert—a private one—where Herr Donau was going to play the piano for his hostess—Lady Blake, Launa, and a friend.

The day was hot, terribly so. The heat rose from the ground, the houses, and the pavement; it struck one like a fiery draught from a furnace. Launa and Mr. Wainbridge were silent; they knew each other well enough to be so. He was pondering. Though he found her interesting he did not agree with her at all about many things, but therein lay her power of attracting him, for she did not care whether she did or not. She did not pretend this as many women do, when men always are aware of it.

“I am hot,” she said.

“And you look cool.”

“I am wishing to be where I could hear the river ripple, and hear the sound of the water as it curls over the rocks. I wish I could see the big lake where it widens, where the pines and the maples grow. Oh, the smell of the wind there!”

“Why won’t you come and sit in the park instead of going to hear Donau?”

“Because I can imagine myself in that far-off land when Donau is playing,” she answered. “I can shut my eyes and feel the wind; I see the water just rippled and then still. In the park it is civilised and hot; the trees are beautiful, but not like those I love. The grass is green, but the wind is parching, and it is town-laden; it is—” She stopped. “Who is that?”

He started at the tone of her voice. It was full of apprehension, of a sort of cold joy, as if she had fought, and was glad to be beaten.

He asked, “Where?”

“I thought I saw someone—someone I knew—someone—Oh, I want to stop, to get out. It is stifling here.”

“There are so many people,” he replied. “I did not notice anyone. Was it a woman? We are nearly there now. Do not get out.”

“No—never mind. It was imagination. I thought I saw—it could not have been really.”

“Ah,” he said, “imagination is deceiving and becoming. You have grown most beautifully flushed. You are very good to look at, Miss Archer.”

“You must talk to Lady Blake,” said Launa. “I am tired.”

The room into which they were shown was dark, cool, and flower-scented. Lady Blake was dressed in black. She was a woman men loved for an hour, a dance, or a day. Sir Godfrey Blake had married her after a short acquaintance. Immediately afterwards he went into Parliament, and now sat out all the debates, and was seldom at home. Men pitied her, women shook their heads, while she loudly lamented a cold husband, and was consoled by other men.

“We have been waiting for you,” she said. “Herr Donau is ready to begin.”

She gloried in her riches, and she was musical, though in the days of her poverty she had not been. Shilling seats and deprivations did not suit her; but to be able to pay the most expensive successful pianist in London for a whole afternoon to play to her and one or two chosen ones, what a triumph! That was success. And if she did not enjoy the music she did derive great satisfaction from saying, “Donau played for us on Sunday; he played marvellously. Of course we paid him.”

“Miss Archer’s imagination has been causing her to see people—a person,” said Mr. Wainbridge, as he shook hands with Lady Blake.

He wanted to see Launa grow red again, as well as to discover who she thought she had seen.

She laughed.

“Was it a ghost?” asked Lady Blake.

She looked uncomfortable. She had some ghosts behind her—a brother and sister who were poor, and who lived at Clapham. They worked, and she ignored them.

“A ghost!” repeated Wainbridge. “Do you believe in ghosts, Miss Archer?”

“Do I? Souls of the dead! I wish I could see them.”

“Don’t!” exclaimed Lady Blake. I believe in premonitory warnings. You did not see me walking, did you, Miss Archer? I *hope* not.”

“No, I only saw an old friend—an old Canadian friend. But it was only in fancy, for the next moment it was gone.”

There was a slight pause when she said “it was gone.” Mr. Wainbridge noticed she used “it.”

Lady Blake said “Oh” sadly, and then continued: “Premonitory warnings are so interesting. Was the friend an old, I mean an ancient grey-headed friend, or only old as regards the time of friendship? Was it a woman?”

“It was a spirit,” said Launa.

“You will hear of a death,” said Lady Blake with solemnity.

“It is already dead,” replied Launa.

“To you?” asked Mr. Wainbridge.

“Are we not going to hear Herr Donau play?” inquired Launa. “You have not forgotten you are to play the Waldstein Sonata for me?” she said to Herr Donau.

“I have not forgotten. Shall I begin?”

“Do,” said Lady Blake, seating herself in a chair covered with cream-coloured material.

Her black dress, yellow hair, and white skin had an ideal, an arranged background. Ideals have to be well arranged, otherwise they are deficient. Launa sat in a dim corner; Mr. Wainbridge chose a chair from which he could observe her.

She was listening intently; she had often played the Waldstein to Paul, and she wanted to see how Donau would play the octave run. Through it all she could think of Paul. Had she really seen him? No, he was not in England. Could he be dead? . . . Donau played the run beautifully. . . . Could Paul be dead? Donau played the octaves with one hand—glïssando. Wonderful! Launa glanced round her; no one appeared to have noticed. Lady Blake was keeping time with her head and her foot. Time in the Waldstein! Launa felt a great wave of longing, of desire for the woods, lakes, and the vastness of the real forest, and for the air. Oh! that air! Keen sometimes, sweet, full of the smell of wild flowers, of the pine woods—and where was Paul?

The Waldstein went on and on. To her it meant spring days, movement, hope, but not in the overcrowded old land. To the others it meant different things—music always does—and Launa’s mind returned to the impression of the afternoon. It could not have been Paul alive that she had seen? Could it be that he was dead, and because she loved him, he came to her? Did she love him? She heard the wailing of the Indian child. But if Paul were dead, he was hers—hers—hers—

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ceasing of the piano and the compliments of Lady Blake and Mr. Wainbridge.

“You were asleep,” said Mr. Wainbridge to Launa.

“No. My thoughts were wandering.”

“With more spirits?”

“Mr. Wainbridge, come here,” said Lady Blake. “Come and see this; it is by Herr Donau. Play it, do, Herr Donau, and then Miss Archer has promised to play ‘Warum.’ ”

“There is a history in that,” said Launa, when the great man had finished. “There is an unravelled thread in it.”

“Ah, yes,” he said, “there is. You have understanding, Miss Archer.”

“And now, will you play ‘Warum?’ ” asked Lady Blake.

“To hear Miss Archer play ‘Warum’ is one of the world’s desires,” said Mr. Wainbridge, “because you puzzle it—the world, I mean.”

She did not answer. Lady Blake rehearsed speeches to all her dear and jealous friends while the music lasted. She would say “Donau and Miss Archer played for us during a whole afternoon.” She

had triumphed.

Launa drove home alone. Mr. Wainbridge to his regret had an engagement. He said good-bye to her with sorrow, while she was indifferent. There was something in the spirit theory after all.

Mrs. Phillips and Mr. Herbert were still sitting at Victoria Mansions. She had changed her dress for a tea-gown and invited him to dinner. The evening was hot. Launa dressed in white and went to the music-room. Conversation did not appeal to her. She began to play, to work hard at an impossible sonata. The hard work was taking away her weariness, the feeling of misery and longing when the door was opened and Captain Carden came in.

"I did not let your maid announce me. I wanted to surprise you, Launa," he said, advancing with an air of expectation. "She said you were not at home, but I heard the piano, and I knew you would see me."

He held out his hand.

"I will finish this page," she said, not taking the hand thus affably extended, and playing on.

Captain Carden seated himself near and stared at her. She could feel his eyes taking her in, all over, gloating over her, but she finished and sat on the music-stool, turning herself round until she faced him.

"Your mother was here to lunch."

"Yes, Launa, she told me so."

"Did you want to see me particularly?" she asked. "I suppose you did, because I said 'not at home.' I am very tired and in a musical mood."

He smiled languidly and leaned back.

"You don't mean that, Launa."

His detestable habit of repeating her name irritated her. She looked at him.

"Why do you never call me Charlie? We are relations."

"Are we?" she asked.

"Yes. That is one reason why I came, and then my mother asked me to come and see you. She and I are both worried. Mother thinks—"

"Do think yourself; you remind me of Uriah Heep."

"My mother thinks," he continued with a sort of leer, "that you are lonely. She fears the friends you have, the contamination of their talk about no morals—she says—"

Launa got up.

"You will either go away or else you will talk of something else. Speak for yourself, pray. I do not care what your mother thinks."

Captain Carden looked at her.

"Don't get cross. You know I am in love with you, and I want to marry you. It will be such an advantage to you, an unknown Canadian, to marry into a good old English family, and to be well looked after."

She was silent, first from surprise, then from anger. It was as if the words would not come rapidly enough.

"Thank you," she said. "I decline your insulting offer. Now will you go?"

"Now, Launa, you know it is the best thing you can do. I am really in love with you. You will have some of your own money settled on you, of course, and you will have an excellent position and be thought a great deal of as my wife."

"I will never be your wife," she answered. "*Never.*"

"All girls want to marry; you do. They all do. I like a girl who pretends to be backward, but this is enough, Launa. Give in now, you know how I love you, you—"

Launa's cheeks were blazing, she got up and rang the bell violently. He followed, unseen by her, until she felt his arm on her waist; his face was detestably close, his eyes staring into hers, glaring like an animal's, and his breath was hot against her face. She gave him one firm push; she had not paddled so much in vain; her arms were very strong, and he did not expect it. He staggered across the room, upsetting a little table and breaking some china ornaments which fell with a crash as he sprawled on the floor. Just then the maid opened the door, and Mr. Wainbridge walked in.

"Curtis, show Captain Carden out," said Launa, apparently with calm indifference.

She looked very tall, slight, and angry, as she stood waiting. Captain Carden gathered himself together with a sheepish look, and advanced towards her.

"Good-bye, Launa."

"Go," she said.

"Launa, say good-bye."

And as the door closed she threw herself into a big chair and laughed. Captain Carden heard it as he left the flat and detected nothing but ridicule in it. Mr. Wainbridge went over to her; he saw she would have cried had she not laughed, and that her nerves were all unstrung.

"Why didn't you tell me to kick him out? He deserved it."

"Why didn't you do it?"

She put her hands over her face, and began to sob. He stroked her hair gently, tenderly, and she liked it.

"I am an idiot! I am an idiot!" she said at last.

"What did he do?"

"How did you come? You were dining at the Grays', I thought you said?"

"I came because I wanted to see you."

She dried her eyes and leaned back in her chair and looked out at the night, feeling the curious rest of exhaustion. The greyness of twilight crept into the room, it was peaceful though still sultry. He took her hand and said:

"I am glad I came."

"So am I," she said, cheerfully. Her mood had changed. "You saved me from unknown bother. He was most impertinent."

In the other room Mrs. Phillips was becoming impatient. She was hungry. At tea-time Herbert's conversation engrossed her, and now where was dinner?

She was also anxious to create a sensation, to surprise Launa and everyone by telling of her speedy marriage, which was to take place in one month exactly. And so she went into the music-room.

"Has that awful Carden man gone? I am so hungry, Launa dear. Do say you are hungry too, Mr. Wainbridge. I am going to be married in a month."

She sighed.

"No wonder, then, that you are hungry," said Mr. Wainbridge, "with that awful prospect you need restoratives of all sorts."

"Lucky Mr. Herbert," said Launa. "I congratulate him."

"How nice of you," said Mrs. Phillips. "I feared you might be small minded enough to congratulate me. He is in the drawing-room—starving too."

"Let us go, then, to dinner," said Launa. "Mr. Herbert, you are so lucky."

"That is good of you," he answered.

"Merely decent of her," said Mrs. Phillips. "She knows my worth."

"How are the spirits?" asked Wainbridge, as Launa and he followed the other two into the dining-room.

"Good. Look at my eyes. Are they red?"

"They are beautiful."

He took her hand for one moment; it was an involuntary caress.

And they drank to the perfect happiness of Mrs. Phillips and Mr. Herbert.

CHAPTER X

THE wedding was over. Mrs. Phillips had become Mrs. Herbert. The accounts were in all the papers, the guests were mentioned, and the bride's attire was described. She wore mauve, a bonnet, and what was not mentioned, a nervous air. The known dangers of matrimony are worse in anticipation, and more true, than the maiden bride's assurance of eternal bliss.

"Miss Archer, an American beauty," said the Chronicler, "accompanied her to the altar, and handed her a smelling-bottle."

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert departed amid no rice and no old slippers. Lily would not have them. They went to hear the nightingales, and to remember Rubinstein's song:

> "The nightingale with fervent song
> Doth woo the rose the whole night long."

For one whole week the weather was glorious and unchangeable.

Launa was alone in Victoria Mansions. Mr. George visited her with frequency, and so did Mr. Wainbridge.

Mr. George often came in the morning.

"I am at my worst early, Launa," he said, "and then I long for strong measures. You are a strong measure. Your name is so perfect, I could not spoil it with a Miss," he added apologetically.

All the old women would have called her a bold Canadian had they not remembered her money and success. England conquered and annexed her Colonies; do not their maidens annex her young men?

Launa missed her father; between them there was a perfect relationship; their minds were in tune; she was so certain of his love and care that she feared no diminution thereof. He wrote to her often, and she thought of shutting up the flat and going to join him.

On Lily's wedding day, Mr. Wainbridge told her he was obliged to travel with his uncle for six weeks. The uncle, Lord Wainbridge, had just constructed a novel; it contained a pinch of all the crazes of the day, and was clever, but not moral. Lord Wainbridge became uneasy, and Lady Wainbridge rampant with rage (designated in this case Christian solicitude about his fall) when she read it. She said the want of morals was his own. She said many things which he did not mind when she only gave utterance to them; but he feared ridicule as he feared nothing else; she said he would be laughed at, so he fled to his nephew, who always had sympathy for him.

Launa received the tidings of Mr. Wainbridge's departure with indifference, though she did feel it. And he decided that her lack of vanity was her one fault. She really appeared as if she did not care whether she attracted him or not. But she thought very much about him. His interest in her was pleasant. It was more. It was necessary to her, as much as anything can be necessary over which we have no control, and without which we must live if it is withdrawn.

The day of his last visit they spent in reading, when he would have much rather talked. But she had a new book.

"How queer it is that the charm of so few poems lasts," she said. "What I loved at sixteen I loathe now, and I suppose what I love now I shall hate at thirty-five."

"We change. You do not love a comic song when your heart aches."

"I have no heart."

"Because I said that, you think I meant your heart," he replied. "I did not."

"Your own then?"

"Perhaps. Do you believe we are responsible for evil?"

"I do not know. Are we responsible for what we cannot help? I could not condemn any one but myself. The existence of evil is true, but how horrible! And how it spoils our lives."

"Spoils our lives," he repeated. "You are quite right! Tell me, can a man or a woman love two

people at once? Is it possible to love evil and good?"

Launa grew pale.

"No one can *love* evil."

"You are right," he said, with triumph. "It is not love then. To do right, one should love something, *someone*."

"Yes," she half whispered, "love someone, even if they are beyond one's reach."

"You have comforted me. I must say good-bye, now. No, I will see you once again, to-night. In six weeks I shall come back, and I shall be glad—glad. What shall you be?"

She did not answer, but stood up and walked across the room to look at a photograph. She would never go back to Canada, *never*.

"Where did you get that photograph?" he asked. "Is it new? Who is it?"

It was Paul. She had kept it locked up until now.

"It is no one you know. It is only a picture which reminds me of evil."

"Take it down—shall I?"

"No, no," she said sharply. "We are terribly in earnest," she added, and gave a little laugh.

She went to the window and looked out. The lights were flashing, and the roar of the city came up to her.

"Good-bye," he said, taking her hand. "Good-bye—*Behüt dich Gott*."

That night Launa went to a dance, which lasted until three in the morning. She wore pink, and looked beautiful. The lust for slaughter, for conquest, for admiration entered into her. She could not love any man, she assured herself, while she knew that she thought only of Paul. But she possessed power. She could *hurt*, and for that one night she gloried in it. This was what the man on the steamer had meant; this was deadening; this was life and din; there was no time to think.

Mr. Wainbridge was there; she gave him one dance only, and he was angry, though he rejoiced when Mr. George said to him:—

"Launa is miserable. Her eyes are unhappy; she is feeling something."

She had expressed herself as yearning for Norway, and that was all; but Mr. Wainbridge thought she wanted him.

The next morning she slept until it was late; she was very tired; When her letters were brought to her she did not open them. She lazily drank her tea and looked at the post-marks, wondering from whom they were. She sent a wire to her father, saying she would like to join him at once.

While she was dressing her maid brought her a telegram. It might be about her new dress, or Lady Blake's picnic, or the concert at which she was to play.

This was what she read:—

"Your father accidentally shot. Dying.
Come.

"STEVENS."

Stevens was a friend who had joined her father.

Launa looked at it; dying—not *dead*. She drank her tea. It was, it must be some detestable, horrible dream.

By twelve o'clock her boxes were packed; and Launa and her maid started on their long, almost useless, journey. To sit still and wait was impossible, it was like watching for someone who never came. The train tore along, and the trees seemed to wave their branches like hungry, relentless demons, as if they would clutch all men; the sea was cruel, and the steamer outrageously slow.

And Launa was too late.

After an absence of one week she came back to London, crushed, weary, and heart-sick. Her life seemed to be over. She had seen him again, but he was dead. There was nothing she could do, it was all over. If only she had Paul! She could have screamed with the torture of fate. She realised the disappointment of life, that nothing could be as it had been. A new life might come to her, but she could never gather the old one together again. Perhaps some day she would be reminded of the past when she had forgotten. To be reminded it is necessary to have forgotten. But now she suffered—now she wanted everything she had not. She felt the torture of the vain longing for the impossible; a blister on her body would have been a relief; there was one on her soul. She wished she had told her father about Paul; she wished she could forget Paul; she wished he were there with her, and then she resolved again to forget him.

She wrote to Mr. Wainbridge and told him of her terrible trouble. It was a relief to pour out her mind to someone who understood, and to whom she could say mad things—whether he sympathised or not she did not care.

She was rich, and inundated with letters of sympathy. Each writer considered herself the one consoler Launa required. Men do not write that kind of letter; they merely leave cards.

Mrs. Carden sent pages of lamentation and exhortation, interspersed with demands for one interview, just one, with her dearest Launa.

Lily Herbert came up to town for the day. She was sorry for Launa when she could remember to be so. It was with great difficulty she could disguise the cheerful grin her countenance had assumed since her marriage. She could not understand Launa's abandonment to grief. If Sir John had died Lily would have wept, when reflecting on her lonely position, and then have smiled over the patterns of new mourning.

Launa remained dumb to her and with her; Lily realised at last, with a certain sort of awe, that Launa was stricken; that she was full of sorrow which was not easily ended, and that she could not bear attempts at consolation, which were merely, and only could be, attempts. Who can raise the dead? Launa passed through the lonely dark valley of nevermore—of hunger for one face, for one word, which is so intense as to be torture, and to which was added the desire for the presence of a

man whom she felt was unfaithful to her. Could *she* bear another man's kisses? How could he then kiss another woman?

To stay in London was impossible for her, and so she chose to go to a little village in Derbyshire which her father had loved as a boy. The Black Country, with its barren moors and lonely stonewalled hills, attracted her; the warm valleys full of bracken and alder bushes, through which the rushing mountain streams tore, had a wild beauty and a lulling power. It was very lonely and bleak. She could walk for miles without seeing anyone, and the people she did meet were for the most part only villagers. Much as she longed to see "Solitude" again, she felt the impossibility of going there.

During all these long, long days of sorrow and direful longing, Mr. Wainbridge wrote to her. Almost every day a letter came, and she began to look for them and to answer them. At first she had only sent him scrawls, but he had gradually drifted into an intimate—a most intimate friend.

She often re-read his letters, and there was more in them than the actual words said. She gave him credit for an intuition which he did not possess. He loved her, and he divined that she did not love him; she could almost love him for that. Women usually love men for imaginary qualities. She thought him brave and pure; she fancied he loved what she did, instead of which he loved her. *Her* personality made life interesting; *her* playing made music an everlasting joy.

The day after she was settled at Fair View she had a long letter from him in answer to her first coherent one.

"Schweitzerhof, Lucerne,
"*July 3rd*.

"At last! I was so glad to get your letter this morning. First, I am going to thank you from my heart for telling me everything, and please remember that I can never be bored by anything that concerns you. Just believe that, and you will trust me, and I may be able to help you with my sympathy at any rate. Dear, I do sympathise, and it is as if the trouble were my own. I can dimly guess what a terrible loss you have had, and I know that your relationship with him was a perfect one. I am so sorry that the letters I have written since I left London have been so selfish and full of my own feelings, while you are in such grief; forgive them. I should love to hear that the knowledge of my sympathy and care is something to you. I need not tell you that I would spare no trouble and no thought if I could help you in the smallest degree, or if I could save you one ounce of care or pain. I know the hardness of it appals you. Can I say or do anything to make you happier?

"I have just been reading for the tenth time 'Andrea del Sarto.' It is wonderful; but how he longed for a soul in his wife, and yet he loved her for her beauty, and she—'again the cousin's whistle.' It is so sad, but how could she love him when she did not understand him? And I suppose it bored her to sit by the window with him while he talked to her, and all the time she was listening for the cousin's whistle, and wishing her husband would begin to paint again. Surely 'a man's reach does always exceed his grasp.' If it did not, we should not want a Heaven at all. Browning knew things, didn't he?

"We are not coming back for some weeks yet, and it makes me sad, for I long to hear your voice again. I love your voice.—

"Yours,

"C. H. W."

A course of these letters was very comforting. To be necessary to someone is what many women are obliged to be, instead of being loved.

The days were long and full of pain. She did not grow accustomed to it. The wound was as open and sore as at first. It was a relief to be alone, and to be allowed to be sorrowful. There was no peace, no joy anywhere.

CHAPTER XI

Lily Herbert as Lily Phillips had realised the importance of keeping her husband's love, not his toleration. Mr. Phillips had been affectionate always, and she had tolerated him. She remembered it all; she had been so relieved and glad when he was away from her, his kisses nauseated her.

With Herbert life was joy, and, had she not firmly believed it could not last, real happiness would have been hers.

Their honeymoon had lasted for three weeks, three weeks of absolute happiness, tempered only by her husband's reflections of sorrow for Launa—for he admired Launa. Lily did likewise, and she feared her, too. Lily wondered whether she was to be the one who cared most; in all marriages one cares more than the other. She had always felt a contempt for women who show they care while their husbands seem indifferent. She blamed them; they were no longer desirable to their husbands; they were within reach. Someone must lead, so she took it: fear lest he should change or grow tired lent terror to all her ideas and movements.

They were staying in Surrey. The house was small, with a garden which was a bower of roses, with beautiful lawns and large cedar trees. They lived out of doors. Mr. Herbert did not work, and she took to embroidery. He told her she looked absolutely lovely when she sewed.

She laughed.

"There is something syren-like about you," he said. "You will never grow old; you could not become unattractive."

"Thank you."

"Is that all—is that all you are going to say to me, only thank you?"

"All," she said.

He came over by her.

"Your hands are so beautiful. I would like to live like this always."

“It would not be always June and warm,” she said.

“I love you, love you absolutely—what can change it?”

“What?” she repeated, even while she feared. “Don’t ask, you will spoil it.”

“You never—will not often let me kiss you. Why is it?”

“I hate kissing.”

“I will kiss you,” he said masterfully. “You are mine, mine, mine. You are an enchantress, a witch. When I am with you, or away from you, I think of nothing but you. My life is all you.”

He took her in his arms gently. She remembered with a shudder those horrible embraces of her first marriage. He kissed her lips, those warm red lips which were one of her chief beauties; but it was all done so gently.

“You were afraid of me,” he said. “Heavens! here is someone coming to call.”

“And you have crushed my blouse,” she said reproachfully.

It was Lady Blake.

“How are you both?” she asked, as she rustled towards them, pretty, smiling, and glancing from one to the other.

“Very happy,” said Mr. Herbert. “The nightingales are still singing.”

“Ah,” said Lady Blake, as she seated herself in his chair, and accepted a cushion from him. “Happy—there is something subdued about happiness. I want you to come and stay with me.”

“When is your uncle coming home?” Lily said to her husband.

“In a week,” he replied.

“In a week then,” said Mrs. Herbert, “we would like to come to you.”

After Lady Blake left he said:

“And now it is over.”

“Not over,” she answered, “just beginning. We stay at Blake House for two weeks, and then papa wants us.”

Mr. Herbert acquiesced. He had given in to her conditions, and he knew what she did not or pretended not to believe, that he loved her with all his soul. He would go with cheerfulness to Lady Blake’s, anything to prolong the honeymoon, and he hoped Lily would forget her proposed arrangement when they returned to town. That oblivion might descend on her mind he prayed!

After their visits they went back to London.

They arrived one morning about twelve, and drove to her flat in Sloane Street, he had his luggage sent to his rooms which were two streets further on.

“I think we might take a larger flat,” he suggested. “It would be cheaper and less trouble.”

She laughed and answered:

“By and by. You remember our bargain? We are not to grow tired like other people or to see too much of each other—enough of each other.”

“And so one of us is to be always miserable,” he said.

“Isn’t it better?” she asked. “Isn’t anything better than for either of us to be tired?”

There were tears in her eyes.

“No, my beloved, it is not better. Will you not think it over? Will you—” he held her hand. “We are so happy, we shall be always. It will last, I swear it will—”

The cab stopped and she got out.

She gave herself a little shake as she went up in the lift. How perilously near giving in she had been! What would it be to her to lose the lover? A husband is a poor exchange. No, she would be firm.

The little flat looked very pretty, there were flowers everywhere. Her two maids welcomed her with smiles and blushes. Lunch was ready.

Mrs. Herbert went to take off her hat. Her own room was decorated with white flowers; it was a dear little white and green room.

“I should like to wash my hands,” said her husband meekly.

“Yes, you may. I will show you my room. Now that we are married I can show you everything. There is a delightful sensation of freedom as well as of bondage in matrimony.”

She took him into her room and left him there.

“That is my spare room,” she said, and pointed to a door. “It will be your room when I ask you to stay here.”

“There is something unusually novel in being asked to stay with one’s wife. It is as if you had me on approval.”

“Don’t say that,” she suggested. “No, you belong to me now.”

“I wish I did. You are like the angel with the drawn sword at the gate of the Garden of Eden. He was not placed there until after Eve had eaten the apple. I suppose I have had a bite of my apple.”

“You are anticipating. You are borrowing trouble. Wash your hands and come to lunch.”

He looked into the next room. It was yellow and white, and dainty and fresh. A row of his boots would disfigure it. His bachelor quarters seemed so dull in comparison. The faint smell of violets came from her clothes, he used her hair brush, and looked at her shoes lingeringly.

They ate their lunch and smoked afterwards.

“This is lovely!” he said, with a sigh.

“And how unlike matrimony. The average husband likes to use his authority at first, and says he will have the pictures altered, and he cannot sleep in a bed which runs from east to west, or from north to south or—”

He looked at her rather sadly.

“You are not an average wife, and I am little more than a bachelor even now.”

“You are a very nice one.”

“Will you come and see my abode? You have seen my sitting-room, but Mrs. Grant has it all done up, and so you must pay me a visit.”

“Do you remember one day when I went to have tea with you, and Mrs. Carson disappointed us?

How terrified I was that someone might see me, though you told the minion to say you were out. Every time the bell rang I thought it was a man who would force his way in; do you remember?"

"Do I not remember? Put on your hat."

"I will change my dress. You will wait?"

"For ever," with a smile and a glance.

So far they both felt matrimony a success; desire had not failed. When would it?

Joy was clouded by apprehension in her mind; in his there was no doubt, no fear. He knew himself better than she did. They walked together to his rooms. He showed her all over them. His housekeeper, Mrs. Grant, welcomed her. She too had arranged flowers in plenty.

"How will you have this room furnished?" he asked, as he threw open the door. It was a large room, the best one in a set of four. It had been his work-room, but he had given it up for another, and a dark one.

"This is to be your room when you come to stay."

She smiled. There was a touch of genius in his suggestion—more a touch of impropriety—which appealed to her.

"You will ask me to stay?"

"Sometimes," he replied. "Not too often, lest you grow weary of me and find fault with the housekeeping."

"Pale pink would be pretty for the room decorations, and also be becoming. I would come more frequently if it were becoming." She turned to look at his pictures. "Oh! here is a photograph of Launa. She gave it to you?"

"Yes," he replied.

"She is beautiful, and what a queer girl! I had no idea her father's death would make her so wretched. She was perfectly crushed. She behaved as if he were her lover."

"He was very fond of her."

"He was devoted to her. I cannot quite make her out. She is—there is a history somewhere. I did not know she had given you her photograph. I suppose she gave them to everyone. She did not keep them only for people she cared for. I am glad," she said suddenly, "that I have enough money to do without yours."

"I can give you presents."

"And ask me to stay."

"For always. I ask you now," he said. "I beg you. Will you stay always with me? Not in these rooms, but we can have one flat together."

"You promised," she answered, with a slightly unsteady voice. "You promised—don't."

To remind a man of his promise when he wants to break it, frequently means the woman would not mind if he did, and if he insists she will give in. It betrays weakness. He put his arms round her and said nothing, but he gave no orders for the immediate furnishing of one large flat. Her experiment should be tried. He had no desire or intention of forcing her to give in nor of being master; just then she would have liked him to be master, but how can a man know these things?

They went back to her rooms for dinner. She put on a creamy gown trimmed with lace; he gave her some pale pink roses and fastened them on. He never forgot her flowers.

In the evening they sat in the big window and looked out at the moon—it rose, a big round shining moon. They were silent. At last she said:

"The stars are larger than the moon, but how faint beside it. The moon is nearer."

"That is what one feels sometimes," he answered. "One loves the stars, but the moon is nearer."

"Yes, it is nearer. Would you feel so? Am I the moon or a star? Of what are you thinking?"

"Of you."

"Of me. Think of something nice."

"You are not nice. You are original, and that is never nice. How lonely I shall be to-night!"

"And I."

Here Mr. George walked in.

"I have come," he said, "to condole with you both on being married."

"How kind of you!" said Lily.

"And to ask you, Mrs. Herbert, whether the bird in the hand is worth two in the bush? There were two in your bush. Do gratify my desire—my ardent desire—for information."

"I will," she replied. "First I must give you some coffee and ask you to look at the moon."

"Moon," repeated Mr. George. "There are many moons; this is the old moon, not your kind, and this one is lovely. Was your moon full of honey?"

"No," replied Mr. Herbert, lighting a cigarette, "ours was without anything sickly or monotonous."

"Or satiating?"

"Exactly," answered Mr. Herbert.

"Tell me now, Mrs. Herbert, about the bush. Is it not better to have two in the bush than the bird in your hand?"

"Are you asking merely as a journalist, Mr. George? Or do you honestly desire information?"

"I desire honest information and information honestly."

"Two in the bush," she repeated.

"Sir Ralph and Mr. Buxton," suggested the inquirer softly. "Perhaps you prefer the bird in your hand as well as the two in the bush, for they are still there. They have returned to town, and are looking more cheerful than they appeared at your wedding. If you remember, they left that festive scene early, before your departure for the desert of matrimony."

"The bird in the hand is enough for me," said Lily, "enough now."

"Ah!" said her husband, with an air of abstraction, "now."

"Yes, now," she said defiantly.

"Now," repeated Mr. George, with exaggerated emphasis. "Why are we all talking of now? Tell

me about Launa, Mrs. Herbert? Where is she?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Herbert, “where is she?”

“I will make you both a present of her address,” said Lily. “She will not see you; you can both write volumes to her, and you, Mr. George, will at once rush by the night or the morning train to see her.”

“No, time and distance will merely mellow her affection for me. I am very fond of her, too fond, for I love her.”

“Dear me,” said Lily. “In what way do you love her? Hopelessly, madly, platonically, or matrimonially?”

“Not matrimonially, because I could never tire of her; not platonically, platonic people are too clever and enjoy their experiences too much to be indifferent, but they never want to kiss each other. I might—”

“These are revelations,” said Mr. Herbert.

“Go on,” commanded Lily.

“I can’t. Launa is perfect. I fear she does not love me. When I call her Launa, her eyelids never quiver. Did you ever quiver, Mrs. Herbert?”

“Never.”

“You are intellectual. I am going to write a book and call it ‘Marriage.’ There will be various assortments in it. Platonic matrimony is interesting.”

“Very,” said Lily.

She went away to get the address for him.

“Wainbridge is very fond of Miss Archer,” said George, when he was alone with Herbert.

“She looked ill when I last saw her. I am going to write to her.”

“Tell her—”

“Tell her what?” asked Lily, returning as he spoke.

“That we are perfectly, indefinitely happy.”

“How unlucky of you, Jack. You never should boast about happiness. It will go. How dreadful of you. I know something will go wrong.”

“You have no nerve,” said Mr. Herbert.

“These connubial differences so early in your matrimonial career are most embarrassing,” said Mr. George. “Later you will seldom or never differ, or differ altogether. Thus do the early quarrels of husband and wife evolve themselves. I must go.”

“Shall we ever become indifferent?” she asked. “Shall we ever grow old and cold and—?”

“Grey,” interrupted Herbert. “The moon will change and not shine.”

They gazed at each other as if appalled by their remarks.

“Anyway the moon does not shine solely for you,” said Mr. George. “Farewell.”

Mr. Herbert accompanied him to the door, and when he came back to her, Lily said:

“Good-night, you must go home.”

“It is so late for me to be out, and I want to stay with you.”

“No. You must go,” she said.

“May I come to breakfast?”

“At a quarter-past nine.”

“Good-night, my darling, my—good-night.”

He lingered. He was loath to go, and she almost said, “Stay, never go;” but she did not say it, and so he left her.

She missed him. He had gone away indifferently, and had not seemed to mind. She had ordered a special breakfast for him next day. Where had he gone after leaving her? The moon and the star comparison returned to her mind. Then she wrote to Sir Ralph Egerton, telling him to come to see her. Had Jack borne their first parting with indifference?

It was part of the plan that the wife should not worry whether her husband suffered indifference or any other malady. Worry causes sleepless nights and wrinkles. Mrs. Herbert went to bed, but the moon shone in and she could not sleep. She hoped he could not; nor did he.

CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Herbert was at home. Her drawing-room had been crowded. Sir Ralph Egerton had paid his first visit, and was more admiring, more devoted than ever. Lily had increased in value in his eyes now that another man had appropriated her. Her desirability was greater because she was out of reach.

Lily was looking particularly well. Sir Ralph had brought her a wedding present and an invitation to go to the play with him. The guests had all left, and he had not succeeded in persuading her to come when Mr. Wainbridge came in, followed by Mr. Herbert.

“Sir Ralph wants me to go to the theatre to-night,” she said, turning to her husband. “You are not asked.”

“I shall be delighted if you will come,” said Sir Ralph politely.

“I cannot,” answered Mr. Herbert. “You have forgotten your engagement, Lily, to come with me.”

“So I have. Sir Ralph, will you dine here to-morrow night and we can go somewhere? I won’t ask you, dear,” she said to her husband, “for you would not be amused.”

“Many thanks, I will come at eight to-morrow,” said Sir Ralph. “Good-bye.”

“Tell me about yourself,” said Lily to Mr. Wainbridge. “How are you?”

Mr. Herbert left them alone.

"I am very well. I want you to help me."

"To help you?"

"Will you try to get Miss Archer to come back to town? I cannot go to Derbyshire to see her."

"You want to see her?"

"Very much."

"I will do what I can. You want to marry her?"

"Perhaps."

"Marriage is not peace—not always."

"It is better than separation and distance," he replied. "Where are you and your husband going?"

"Out—to the opera and then to supper somewhere."

After he went away Lily wrote to Launa and then dressed and went out with her husband. They were so happy when they were together, and his absences, ordered by herself, were so trying—he was kind and strong, moreover he loved her. How terrible if he were to forget, to grow cold! She hardened her heart—her way was the best. She forgot that a day comes when passion must grow cooler; then it is that friendship seasoned by passion takes its place, and makes life rest and sweetness. She was torn with jealousy lest he might care for some other woman, for if he were to, he would not settle down to the dull, assured matrimonial existence when he grew used to her, and probably seek amusement elsewhere. This was her way of keeping his love. She let him see her seldom, not often alone. He heard of her flirtations from herself. She loved him absolutely, and she feared the force of her love might cause his to grow cold, therefore she kept him at a distance and hungered for a sign, for a caress from him, while she never betrayed her feelings.

The next day Launa received the following letter. She was starting for a long walk when it came, and read it on the way.

"My Dearest Launa,—How are you? We are longing to see you. Do come to London. Are you not coming for your music? Mr. Wainbridge was here to-day. He is much concerned, dear, that you do not come back to town. He fears you may be going to Canada to leave us all. Jack is most anxious to see you too. We are still happy, madly, gloriously, interruptedly happy. Interruptions are salutary—they add joy to the everydayness of life. Dear Launa, *do* come back soon.

"Thine as ever,
"L. H."

Launa went across the moor to the "Cat and Fiddle." Only by long walks could she kill the restlessness which overcame her. She was longing to hear some music again, and Lily's letter arrived at exactly the very best time for Mr. Wainbridge.

Mr. Wainbridge wrote almost every day. He sent her books, music, and flowers. He tried to induce her to come to town. He told her that he loved her with a love of the soul, that his one longing was to comfort her, to endeavour to make up for the grief and despair of the past. She thought of him with interest. He possessed the glamour of a lover for her without any of the disadvantages of being enamoured herself. This was an affection of the mind—a soul-love that he felt for her; it lulled her into security. She resolved to leave in a week for London, there to begin her music again.

As she walked home across the moor, she thought of the days at "Solitude" with her father—she felt old and sad. Work only was left; her aspirations on first coming to London seemed the foolish yearnings of a child for the moon. She would *do* something—play, work, and forget with her heart and soul, and also she *would* care for some person. This unsatisfied longing for the woods, for her father and the old life must be crushed, and speedily. How easy it was to label her longings! She did not add the desire for one word from Paul to them, and yet that was the greatest one of all. Lily's suggestion that she might intend to go to Canada again filled her with loathing. How could she face "Solitude"?

And so she and her maid journeyed to Victoria Mansions. Lily came to welcome her, and expressed herself as being enchanted with life, though really Jack and she were starting on an unsatisfactory wild-goose chase. Occasionally they had a day together—sometimes he merely came to dine when she was having a party. Sir Ralph spent many and long days with her; they went about together, and Jack waited. He had a firm belief in his own future with her. She would tire of this life and be glad to rest, and know he would care always.

When Launa had set her house in order, and had the piano tuned, she began to take music lessons again.

Mr. Wainbridge came at once to see her. She wanted to take up their friendship where they had left it before their letter-writing; he had added the letters, the wishes and imaginings of their separation to it. At first this intentional game of cross-purposes amused him. She would not understand what any one might have seen.

She wanted friendship, only bounded by all the old opinions, with love-making confined to books. There was a grey shadow between her and love-making. Mr. Wainbridge saw it and was patient.

About this time Launa met the Coopers. Mrs. Cooper was a relic as well as a relict—her one daughter Sylvia was of the present day. They were very poor, and Sylvia worked very hard.

Mrs. Cooper knew how to dress in silk or satin, decorated with lace; but to adapt herself to serge was quite beyond her capabilities. She was a woman who could only order a dinner of an era which is passing away. Clear soup, turbot, or cod-fish, with thick sauce, roast beef, a heavy pudding, plum or cabinet—no savoury—and for dessert candied fruit and oranges. Dainty dinners and economy were unknown to her. Sylvia did the housekeeping, and Mrs. Cooper wept. Her husband had been angelic, with a decided turn for unpunctuality, which is the prerogative of angels. This was a daily cross to his wife, and her husband bore her revilings with a saintly and irritating fortitude. Sylvia Cooper was pretty. She was small and pale, with browny green eyes and brown hair. She met Mr.

George at Victoria Mansions; he had vainly tried to get introduced to her. He went to the editor of the *Signal*, the new paper which was to be the signal for every one's opinions—lords and ladies, ballet girls, actresses and actors, all wrote for it; only managers did not write for it, and they disliked it. The notoriety the publication of opinions brought was not always agreeable.

Mr. George thought of interviewing Miss Cooper, as she sang in the chorus of the newest and most dull opera.

The editor of the *Signal* said if she were pretty he would have her photograph, and if she had broken any of the commandments, he would allow the interview to be published.

Mr. George said she was pretty, and as for the commandments, Miss Cooper looked as if she had never heard of them. So he started for the Fulham Road, where she lived.

First he saw Mrs. Cooper. She received him with the graciousness his clothes and boots deserved. When he explained his errand she gasped with horror.

Fortunately at this moment Sylvia entered and the tragic situation ended. Mr. George asked questions and obtained her photograph for the paper.

"I will not repeat any of the opinions you confide in me," he said. "If I did, and you said you preferred fine days to rainy ones, you would see in all the papers that Miss Cooper owns to a fondness for fine days, but she need not imagine that Heaven will be gracious to *her* at the expense of the farmers."

"Or cab drivers," said Sylvia. "Showery weather must be their harvest time. Still no paper will notice my opinions. Why did you come to interview me? I am nobody."

"I want to get your ideas on chorus work."

"Yes? Well, you shall have them by and by. We need not talk of my feelings or of my preferences—but will you have some tea?"

He owned to being a friend of Launa's and a cousin of Sir Anthony Howard's. Mrs. Cooper forgave everything then, and found his visit of over an hour too short. As soon as he left he drove to Victoria Mansions.

Launa had just come in. She had lunched at the Herberts'. Mr. Wainbridge as usual was with her.

"You will never guess where I have been," said Mr. George, with complacency, accepting a third cup of tea. Launa's tea was always good; at Sylvia's there was no cream. "I suppose," he reflected, "there are lives without cream."

"Tell me where you have been."

"Interviewing Miss Cooper for the *Signal*, and here is her photograph."

"Not really," said Launa, with interest. "How naughty of you when I refused to introduce you to her, for I do not approve of you."

"Now, Miss Launa, you are real mean, as you Yankees say."

"I am a Canadian."

"I know it. Haven't I kept your secret? Did I ever tell Mr. Wainbridge how you fell violently in love with me and told me so, and how you would hold my hand? And how I did stroke yours? I was obliged to that night of the Fulton's ball. The night you cried—you had just been dancing with Mr. Wainbridge—you said you were tired—you said—"

"It is nothing new for Miss Archer to be tired," interrupted Mr. Wainbridge. "Did she see a ghost? She saw one, I remember, on a Sunday afternoon."

"And you are base," said Launa. "I will not invite you to any of my parties to meet Sylvia. You have thus betrayed my tenderest feelings and my tears. For what paper was your interview?"

"The *Signal*, I told you. Now, don't roll your eyes, Launa; you are not shocked, I know. What could I do? You see you would not introduce me to her; Wainbridge said he could not; Mrs. Herbert is so much married *à la mode*, that I, a young and innocent young man, cannot risk my slender reputation in her company. Then I thought of the *Signal*. Their leave was easily procured; they have no intention of paying me, and they will publish her photograph some day. Her mother was alarmed when she heard why I had come. I trotted out my cousin, Sir Anthony, and you, Launa. We had tea, and I am going again soon; perhaps they may come with me some Sunday afternoon somewhere."

"Indefinite," said Mr. Wainbridge, "but convincing of your affection for her. Take care."

"Tell me about Sylvia," said Mr. George. "Wainbridge, you know her well. Isn't there a story attached to her?"

"Yes."

"Tell us," said Launa. "Do."

"When the Coopers were well off, only two years ago, Sylvia met Lord Fairmouth. He is in Africa, or somewhere."

"Go on," said Launa.

"You are quite safe, I know; but that young ruffian, will he tell?"

"Tell," repeated Mr. George. "I long to kick you down the stairs, Mr. Wainbridge. Go on."

"Sylvia did not know he was married, and they met every day. He loved her. His wife was a woman who—"

"Who belonged to every and any man as well as to him," suggested Mr. George.

"Sylvia, then," continued Mr. Wainbridge, "was very religious. She did not believe in marriage after divorce. Fairmouth could easily have got rid of his wife; but Sylvia was firm, so he left her and then went away. She probably sent him."

"How terrible!" said Launa. "Could they not have met sometimes? Might not his love have been a comfort to her?"

"Moralists say not," said Mr. Wainbridge.

"Such love cannot be real," said Launa. "I used to think love was immortal."

"It would be immortal," said Mr. George. "Too pure for this earth."

The two men looked at her.

"Almost thou persuadest me that such things can be," said Mr. George.

“I have learned such a lot,” she said, “in London. Love is marriage and an end.”

“I am not going to murmur marriage to Sylvia,” said Mr. George. “I have left it out altogether in my new book, the difficulty was to dispose of my man and woman. I overcame that by saying, ‘The end is the usual one.’ To return to Sylvia. I am not afraid of a breach of promise, but nowadays marriage is labelled a ‘question,’ and the reviewers are so tired of it; they are all married. I fear I must leave you now, Miss Launa. Good-bye.”

“Be a good boy! Don’t chase the cat or—Good-bye.”

“Suppose you were situated as they were,” said Mr. Wainbridge, “would you have sent him away? Would you have been afraid?”

“Afraid?” she repeated, with a contempt for fear. “No, I would have loved him—forever and ever. Why, because a man is bound to a vile woman, need he make the woman he loves vile because he loves her, or because he is bound?”

She looked at him, flushed with excitement, and doing battle for truth, and he realised that to some women love does not mean temptation because they are usually ignorant—at first. It would be difficult to explain this to Launa.

“I know not,” he whispered.

“I often wish,” she said, half to herself, “that we knew more of what will happen after death, if we were only told—should we try more? There is such temptation to become lethargic—to drown remembrance in the waters of Lethe.”

“You have no temptation. Do you want a reward? That is the lowest type of religion.”

“I do not want crowns, and vast seas of gold have no charm for me. Do you not suppose that Sylvia often wonders whether she will meet and know the man she loves again?”

“Certainly she does, and she will see him and know him here. He won’t be able to stay away.”

“You don’t believe in a future anywhere?”

“I believe in another world,” he said, “in another life where a verdict of temporary insanity as regards the foolishness of man’s doings in this life will be given with frequency. Most of us are not responsible for what we do. You know if a man or a woman kills his or herself the jury usually call it suicide while temporarily insane. Many of us commit self-murder for this life, but, in the eyes of the higher jury, if it exist at all, we are temporarily insane.”

“Don’t say if it exist; it must, else it were never worth one’s while to give up anything.”

“Is giving up worth it? Is it?” he asked. “Why not take all one can get? it is little enough. I love you,” he added softly, and put one arm round her.

“Don’t,” she said sharply, “*don’t*; I cannot bear being touched.”

“You love me?”

“No, I love no one. I like you, we are friends. You like what I do. You must not spoil it by loving me.”

“What did George mean when he said you had cried one night after dancing with me?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“I did not offend you?”

“No; oh, no. It had nothing to do with you personally. Can’t we be as we were?”

“I have always loved you. I long to help and comfort you, to make you happy. Do you think that impossible?”

“Why ask inconvenient questions?”

“Is it inconvenient? My dearest, I did not mean it.”

“Because she cares for me she was afraid happiness was never coming,” he thought.

A man always attributes a woman’s refusing to tell him how much she cares to her being too shy to talk of it; never to her not caring enough. “Yet does she care?” he wondered. That he might still doubt, and not be obliged to think of settlements and the wedding ring was satisfactory, it left an element of uncertainty in their relations; he could dare to be tender, yet not too loving. Men marry because there is nothing else to do, he thought. They know all about their future wives, their affection is returned, it is satiating—there is nothing new.

Ten minutes afterwards Launa was singing Darkey songs for him, and laughing as if her quest for happiness were over—successfully.

As he bade her good-bye, she gave him her hand.

“Is that all?”

“Yes; all. Next time I shall not shake hands, between friends it is unnecessary.”

“I can wait.”

“Do,” she replied. “You could not well do anything else.”

He could not feel sure that it was time even to think a wedding ring would ever be required.

CHAPTER XIII

London and December—fogs and fires—cosy rooms and misery, side by side.

Lily came to breakfast, and found her husband waiting with her letters.

“Good-morning,” she said politely.

“Bad-morning,” returned he morosely.

“Why have you come? I said neither of us was to disturb the other when either was ill.”

“I am not ill. I have arrived because you chose me for better, for worse, and now you let me have my breakfast alone. I hate breakfast, and I love you. You do not greet me with joy.”

He came over to put his arm round her.

“After breakfast. It is too early for anything except tea.”

“That cup which does not inebriate. I wish to Heaven it would or could inebriate you. You might be less cold, less—”

“Married.”

“You speak as though you expected this—as though this phase of ours is not new to you. Is it a phase?”

“I do not know. I fear—oh, Jack, why is it?”

This cry for information was at least human.

“It is this detestable flat system. Let us go and live in a house—with stairs,” said Jack.

She laughed.

“How amusing. The stairs would not make me—or you—different.”

“I am tired of being alone.”

“I thought you were going to say of being married. Loneliness is the philosopher’s joy.”

“I am a man, not a philosopher.”

“And my husband.”

“Yes, your husband.”

“Why do you sigh?”

“Did I sigh?”

“Have some more tea.”

“I will. I do feel cheered. Perhaps if I stayed here all day, and you made tea for me, I should feel contented.”

“You have not yet told me why you came.”

“Hans Breitmann gib ein barty. Where is that barty now?”

“Who is going to ‘gib ein barty’?”

“I am,” he replied.

“Am I to be invited?”

“If you are good.”

“I am always good. I am not always happy.”

“And the pious books say, if you were the one you would be the other. Bertie’s play is to come off on the 16th. He has got me a box. You want to see it?”

“Yes. It is said to be clever.”

“Bertie isn’t,” said Herbert.

“He did not write it, Miss Fisher did. She will get half the profits. But who are the ‘barty’?”

“You and I, Sylvia, George, Wainbridge, and Launa.”

“Too respectable, married and dull. We are to do wedded felicity, while they seek to imitate us. They are known to be desirous of so doing.”

“Who else can I ask?”

“Sir Ralph, Lady Hastings. Leave out Launa and Mr. Wainbridge. Sylvia and Mr. George will do, if she can come. She is still moon-struck, or lord-struck, or virtue-struck. Why did she send him away? She will never marry Mr. George.”

“I thought Launa was your friend?”

“So she is.”

“I do not advise anyone to marry, do you? It is an uncertain, disquieting bondage, even our way.”

“Even our way,” she repeated.

Jack thought he detected a sign of disappointment in her acquiescence. It is all very well to abuse oneself while seeking contradiction, but to have one’s husband call the joy of matrimony uncertain—that brings uneasiness into the mind of the wife.

Lily ate some toast, and felt disappointed. He did not love her more because of her inaccessibility.

“You will come to see the play with me? We shall have supper at the Savoy.”

“Very well. You will ask Sir Ralph and Lady Hastings?”

“I think not.”

“Sir Ralph is very fond of me.”

“So am I.”

“Are you? I want to sit next to him at supper.”

“You can sit by me, dear.”

“Why not call me ‘my love’? That is what a husband usually calls his wife, ‘my love’—it is a sort of mockery—‘my love’ when it is dead and gone.”

“My love is not dead nor gone.”

“Yet you will not please me about Sir Ralph. If we gave up this detestable flat system, the inviting and arranging of parties would be left to me, my lord.”

“You may ask all the people you like, dear. You may give a ball, if you will, only live in a house with stairs.”

“Not yet, dear.”

“I must go now, and leave you. Every time I leave you it grows harder. Why must it be?”

“I will come to your party on the 16th, and I will bring Sir Ralph.”

“I do not want him.”

“Yes, you do. Did you get my gloves?”

“They will come to-day. Good-bye.”

Quickly he put his arm round her and rapidly kissed her.

“There!”

“Go home,” she replied. “Matrimonial endearments thus early in the morning are unusual and uncomfortable.”

Then she sat down and read her letters.

“He won’t ask Sir Ralph,” she thought. “Shall I go? I am tired of Sir Ralph, and Jack never bores me.”

She ordered her husband's favourite pudding for lunch, and arranged the flowers, but he did not come. He was afraid of wearying her, and sat in his rooms, wanting to go to what he called the Haven, but not daring. A drawn sword hovered over his Paradise. After lunch Lily wrote to him.

"My Dearest,—You thought me a cold brute this morning, I know. Can't you understand how it is? I am so terribly afraid of your ceasing to care that I seem so indifferent? Marriage we all know does not increase love. And I feel that if I were once to show you how much I love you you would change. Your love would grow less; we cannot stand still; and I am trying to control fate, to hold you and to keep you forever. I know that my power over you would vanish if you were sure of me, and if we were to settle down in a house with stairs, you would soon regard me as an article of furniture—necessary perhaps to your comfort, but to be easily replaced if broken. You are such a husband now; that is what I resent, and you are too fond of coming to breakfast; why are you not my lover still? If I were your mistress you would come and dine with me, and we should be perfectly happy. You would not dream of inquiring what men or man had called, and the duration of each visit; you must make love to me as you used to do and trust me absolutely. I am yours—I think of you always, not sometimes but *always*, and I hunger for your presence, for your touch. But I could not bear your toleration, and I loathe the husband attitude you sometimes assume. Do you do it because you fear to weary me with your caresses? I think so, but you are wrong. I love you, love you. What a fool I am!—

"Yours,

"L."

After writing this she went to call on her husband's aunts. They as usual reduced her to a state of irritability, and she walked home full of reflections upon boredom. This was rapidly dispersed by Sir Ralph, who was waiting for her with a new book. Tea restored her mind to its normal balance, and conversation, with a cigarette, brought back her belief in herself. That morning she had been singularly near leaning on Jack. Sir Ralph amused her, he was so easily hurt, and in such open bondage to her. While talking with him, the impossibility of a *grande passion* in these days manifested itself to her. She got up and went to her writing-table—in a drawer was her letter to Jack. She had intended to send it to him after dinner; it would have brought him to her at once. For one night anyway she would have experienced exquisite happiness. She shut her eyes, remembering the perfect joy; it was almost pain to think of her love for him. Then she hurriedly tore up the letter, and burned it.

"It is strange how many phases one's mind goes through in a day," she said.

Her letter burned quickly and curled up, as if the flames hurt it, and it was in pain. She moved uneasily, for it almost hurt her.

"This morning I was different."

"Were you?" asked Sir Ralph. "My mind never changes. I am always the same."

"How very dull! I am never the same. Are you asked to the party of my lord and master on the 16th?"

"No."

"You have heard nothing of it?"

"Not yet. I wanted you to come with me to see the new ballet on the 16th. I came to ask you. Now, I suppose, you will not come."

"I know not. Shall I not? Yes, I will come—alone!"

"Alone! So much the better, and to supper afterwards at the Savoy?"

"Yes."

"Good. You will wear?"

"Black."

"I will send you some flowers."

"The advantages of matrimony are supreme. I am enjoying it immensely."

"Really? I should have thought it might be dull for you."

"Oh, no; not with all of you to amuse me."

After he left she dressed and went to a party, where she met him again. It was a cheerful entertainment, without any dull people to ask questions. Mrs. Herbert found several ladies took much interest in her affairs, and in her husband's whereabouts. They did not ask such questions twice, but it annoyed her to know of what they thought. They blamed Jack. As a husband he ought to look after that young woman.

For the next few days, Mrs. Herbert avoided being alone with her husband. She invited him to lunch when other people were present, and he did not enjoy it, though he comforted himself by thinking of the 16th. Mr. Herbert made arrangements for his wife to stay all night at his abode, and found himself strung up to a pitch of joyful expectation.

In those days of waiting, her mood was uncertain, morose, absurd, and cross at intervals. Mr. Herbert waited for his day of reckoning; he intended to settle all things on that eventful night, to have all or nothing.

They were at the theatre watching the new play. Launa, Sylvia, Mr. George, and Mr. Wainbridge. Mr. Herbert was watching for Lily. She was often late.

A note was brought to him; he opened it with indifference, which did not last. His wife had sent it as she drove off with Sir Ralph to see the ballet.

Mr. Herbert left the theatre and walked up and down outside, mad with rage and heartache. Fool, fool, that he had been; to love her, to trust her. She had killed love and trust, he assured himself; while all the time he knew she had not, that was the greatest torture.

Mrs. Herbert and Sir Ralph had a box at the Grosvenor. Her dress was most becoming, which is the wine that maketh glad the heart of woman; but, strange to say, she could not forget her husband. It is usually so easy to forget.

She planned a breakfast party next day. Jack would come to take her out; she loved a cockney day with him, when they travelled first-class and called it cockney. There was skating, they would

go together; and she would forgive him with effect and solemnity.

"Herbert's party comprises Miss Archer as the only lady," said Mrs. Herbert. "Well, she is beautiful."

"He thinks so."

"And so do I," she replied. "Launa alone, how odd!"

"Why? I am very liberal; I cannot see why Launa and your husband should not have a party as you and I are doing."

"We are old friends."

"Yes. Are we anything else? We are old friends."

"And they are new ones."

"The length of time makes no difference," he said. "I could love a new friend in a week better than an old friend in a year."

"How true!"

How glad I am, she reflected, that Jack and I have two flats. If we were in one small space to-night we should quarrel.

She went home feeling sad. Would Jack be waiting for her? A few strong words, a few strong kisses, and where would her philosophy have been? Repentance would have replaced it.

The weather was very cold. Near Polton there was a lake, on which the skating was good. Launa and Lily had arranged to meet at Paddington, and go down there for a few days. Launa waited an hour for Lily, and then went without her.

The Polton Arms was a celebrated hotel, because the landlady was a celebrated cook. Launa took her maid, and resolved to stay and skate without Mrs. Herbert. Mr. Wainbridge did not know her address.

The luxury of solitude for a short space was pleasant to her, and the landlady had known her father. Launa spent all the day on the lake; the days were wonderfully clear and cold, and the air and the motion were as new life to her.

One day when she came back to the Polton Arms, and entered the big warm hall, in which burned a wood fire, Mr. Wainbridge came forward and took her hand.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Surprised, and well."

"I have come to see you. I could not get on any longer without you."

"How did you discover me? Come and have tea now."

Her sitting-room was very pleasant, the usual hotel adornments had vanished. There was peace; and they sat and talked until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Propriety," said Launa, "demands that you should dine downstairs, and I in my sitting-room alone; but the claims of propriety are not imperious. We will dine together."

Wainbridge felt perfectly happy, perfectly content; Launa was feeling soothed and lulled by the sensation that someone cared excessively for her. It was so desolate to be always alone, and she wanted someone to take care of her.

For the rest of the week they met every day, and spent it together skating. As Mr. Wainbridge could not waltz on skates she taught him.

"This is a sort of honeymoon," he said.

"Without any bother. Honeymoons are troublesome."

"That depends on the moon and the honey. I like it in the comb."

One day they were just starting for the lake when they met Captain Carden. Launa bowed to him, and did not appear uncomfortable at what he considered an inopportune meeting for her. Captain Carden went back to town that night, and told Mr. George, whom he met, that Launa was staying at Polton with Mr. Wainbridge.

"They are staying together," he said. "How lucky for her she is not married, for I saw them."

Mr. George promptly remarked that unless Captain Carden wanted kicking, he had better go, which he did.

The Cardens still felt a tender interest, an endless curiosity about Launa. They regretted her fall from grace, and Mrs. Carden felt with sorrow that she had wandered far from the safe haven of her protection; but when Charlie told her Launa was with Mr. Wainbridge, then did she mingle tears and rejoicings.

"We shall get her yet," he said at last. "When no one else will know her, she will be glad to be Mrs. Carden."

"A Mrs. Carden whom no one will know," said his mother. "How terrible!"

"But her money," he suggested.

They were drinking tea together—a pale, straw-coloured liquid. For once Mr. Carden had not grumbled; for the present they were united. The maid announced, "Mr. Harvey."

Mrs. Carden rose and bowed. Mr. Harvey advanced with the self-possession of a Somebody, and the assurance of an American.

"I must apologise," he said, "for troubling you. I came to get Miss Archer's address. Her father once gave me yours as the means of finding him in town. I am a friend of theirs, and live near them in Canada."

"Launa's address?" repeated Carden.

"Address," echoed his mother. "Please sit down."

"Her address," replied Harvey.

"Launa was in the country," said Mrs. Carden. "She lives at Victoria Mansions, but I am sorry to say she is a very odd girl. She loves the world."

"It is beautiful," said the Canadian. "Then she has not changed."

"Beautiful, is it?" observed Mrs. Carden.

"If you will kindly give me her exact address, I will not trouble you any further."

Mrs. Carden went to her writing-table and wrote it. As she handed it to him she said:

"Are you her relation or her guardian? I believe my cousin married a Canadian."

"I am not her guardian."

"We—my son and I—are much worried about her. He met her down at Polton. She was staying there, and so was a man called Mr. Wainbridge."

Here she paused for exclamations.

"Well?" said Paul.

"Not well," said Mrs. Carden. "It is very wrong of Launa to stay at an hotel with a man—with—a—man. Do you understand?"

"No," replied Paul. "Not what you mean me to understand."

"They frequently had their meals together."

"Quite right."

"My son is in love with Miss Archer. He is as careful about her reputation as about his own."

"He had better be," answered Paul. "He should have held his tongue, and not have invented vile stories."

Then he went away. Captain Carden immediately became furious, because Harvey had said he had invented stories.

Paul had been in London a week. He was determined to find Launa, to make her love him. It was only that one day she had been different. Her words, her look had been as if he were an outcast, a glance of loathing she had thrown at him. He remembered it always, but he loved her, longed for her intensely; and now he was determined to know what she had meant when she said she felt outraged. He had no reason to suppose she could care for him. Indeed, her absence from Canada, her rebuke the day after he had shot the horse, all showed that she did not love him. Yet she had not always seemed to hate him. Love and hate are closely connected, and he would know what she really felt, because he could not live without her. He had tried the North-West big game shooting; he had rushed madly about, and cried for madder music, stronger wine to help him forget; and through it all she was there.

Now these detestable people said untrue things about her; nevertheless he shuddered slightly as he remembered what they had insinuated.

He drove back to the Metropolis and walked past Victoria Mansions. Then he went in. He saw her name on the doorpost, and boldly marched up the stairs, disdaining the porter's suggestion of the lift. Outside her door he could hear her playing and singing:

> "Long is it I have loved thee,
> Thee shall I love alway,
> My dearest;
> Long is it I have loved thee,
> Thee shall I love alway."

It was a Canadian song, he knew it well. He whistled it softly as he went down the stairs. Outside it was cold and beginning to rain. He did not feel it.

> "Long is it I have loved thee."

CHAPTER XIV

Captain Carden found himself in an unusual and delightful situation: he had something to say, and that something interested various people. Launa had attracted a certain amount of attention, from the British matron upwards, but being a Canadian, which, after all, is as bad as being an American, all things were expected of her, and being rich, all things were forgiven her. She had appropriated young men, but seemed to prefer quality to quantity.

Since her father's death, she had lived in great seclusion. The world gave her no credit for it, it was the seclusion, no doubt, of one who is well amused. People talked uncertainly to her about art and music, for it was rumoured that she was composing, and in truth she was working and having lessons from Herr Donau.

Captain Carden had never forgiven her laugh that night. Ridicule to this gallant son of Mars was torture. He sallied forth garnished with importance, and carrying a full card-case to call on his many friends. He went first to Lady Blake's. He had murmured to many people, "Have you heard about Miss Archer?"

He had no cause to think that Lady Blake would receive him with rapture, but his news would interest her.

Lady Blake was at home. She was alone and hating it, so she welcomed Captain Carden with joy. Her last party had been a failure. Mr. Wainbridge had plainly taken no interest in her latest quarrel with her husband, and Herr Donau talked of nothing but Miss Archer's wonderful execution. Captain Carden was a man, and as such, available for conquest, and she welcomed him as a relief to her feelings.

They talked of the weather, of the opera, and finally he mentioned Launa.

"Is there no other girl in London? Must you all talk of her?"

"Why?" he asked. "Have you heard?"

"Heard what? Tell me," she said.

"I thought you knew. I really cannot tell you."

"I never would believe anything about another woman, it is so cruel to one's own self—so low, I think. Unless, of course, it were absolutely true, and then I should feel sorry."

She uttered her words with a sublime air of pity.

“Yes; I know you would. Still, some women—”

“Some women?”

“Are queer.”

“Are they?” she inquired.

“Free—strange in their ideas of propriety. Miss Archer is, I think.”

“We all know that Canadians are free. Canada is not exactly a Republic—not a Monarchy. The country has no institutions, and that must affect the women—don’t you think so?”

She had the sweetest, most appealing way of saying “don’t you think so,” with an accent on the “don’t” and on the “you” which men and old women found very attractive.

“There is an atmosphere of a wigwam and the wilderness about them, that is the reason men like them—before they marry them.”

“They skate so well, too,” he said. “Have you been skating? I spent a day or two at Polton. I met Miss Archer with Mr. Wainbridge, and they were staying together at the inn. She skates splendidly.”

He then said “Good-bye,” and left her considering the subject and all its various possibilities. Launa and Mr. Wainbridge together at the same hotel. There is only one way in which a man and a woman can be staying together at an hotel. Either they are married or they ought to be. She laughed and told her next visitor.

Captain Carden then went to see Mrs. Herbert. Sir Ralph, Mr. George, and various other men were there, and two women.

Captain Carden, quietly but sorrowfully, related his story to Mrs. Herbert.

“Miss Archer and Mr. Wainbridge!” she repeated, “alone at the inn. Well, what matter? If they like to be foolish, why shouldn’t they? It sounds very terrible; but if I were you, Captain Carden, I would not repeat it. Let it go. Believe me, the path of a reformer is a difficult one, and reformation is uninteresting, especially if it is impossible. Good-bye,” she added. “I am sorry you have to go.”

Sir Ralph and Mr. George stayed after everyone had left, and talked.

Mrs. Herbert did not believe Captain Carden’s story, at least not in the way he wanted her to; but she was jealous of Launa, and rather glad to hear anything to her discredit. She turned to Mr. George, and asked:

“How is your Proverb book?”

“Not progressing very rapidly,” he answered. “I have taken to interviewing. I find it more amusing.”

“Whom do you interview?”

“Young and interesting women—the women of the future.”

“Is it true what they are saying of Launa?” she asked.

“What do they say?”

“That she and Mr. Wainbridge were alone at Polton together at the hotel there.”

“Well?”

“That is all. You must acknowledge that if a girl stays with a man at a country hotel—”

“A country hotel! Is that bad?” he interrupted. “The town is always respectable. I understand. What a pity they had not stayed at the Grand or the Metropole. I am so glad I live in town. Aren’t you, Egerton?”

“Rubbish,” she replied. “You misunderstand me.”

“Not at all. Tell me more,” said George.

“I am worried about Launa. Her reputation will suffer.”

Sir Ralph rose and said:

“Good-bye—to-morrow at ten.”

He hated the mere idea of moral reflections.

“Has Launa a reputation yet?” asked George. “A woman must be talked about for three seasons, and have four married men in love with her. That is a reputation. It is eating your cake and having it too, and you are endeavouring to do that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You tell me what they say of Launa. They say far worse of you. They say Sir Ralph lives here—not that you stay in the same hotel—by accident, simultaneously—which happened to her. They say that Buxton and Sir Ralph are partners, and that Herbert is useful. It is like the women in the Bible, you remember? ‘We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by thy name.’ Herbert gives the name.”

“You had better go,” she said. “You are a coward to say all these things to a woman. You would not dare say them if I were a man, or if Jack were here.”

“No; but he seldom is here, and he is useful as a shelter. I would not have said this if you had not made me angry about Launa. She is one of the best women I ever knew.”

“Your experience then is limited.”

“Good-bye. You live in too large a glass-house to throw stones, unless you are absolutely reckless and desire the smashing of your own roof.”

With this he left her, and she sat and thought it all over. She was very angry with Mr. George, and yet she laughed. She felt so absolutely sure of herself, and knew her husband was the one man in the world she loved. These others were merely to keep herself from thinking—they were to her what embroidery is to some women. Why should people talk of her? And Mr. George—what a brute he was!

What she hardly dared acknowledge to herself was her husband’s daily increasing indifference. He had been away since the 16th, and he had not told her where he was going.

Was he often with Launa? Jealousy, a raging, burning hatred of the woman who was liked so much, filled her mind, and she stamped her foot with rage. Then she wanted to cry. To feel herself powerless, to know herself mistaken, both were new emotions, both were uncomfortably true and horrible.

Marriage, she reflected, was always a failure; to keep one's husband as a lover is impossible. At this moment Mr. Herbert came in.

"You!" she exclaimed, with mixed feelings of pleasure and surprise.

"You are alone?"

"How do you do?" she said. She always remembered the observances of polite society. "I am alone. Look behind the curtain or under the sofa if you think I have a man hidden anywhere."

She resisted an impulse which said, "Speak, say you love him." He looked in one of his critical moods, so she summoned all her energies to her aid and crushed away any feeling she possessed.

"I am very well," he answered. He looked tired. "I am going to Cairo to-night to do some writing for the *Signal*."

"You are going . . . and I?"

"You will stay here," he answered, with cheerful unconcern. "You have all you want."

"All—Jack! don't go. They say—I will even live in a house with stairs."

"You have heard! What have you heard?"

She got up and came near him.

"I shall miss you terribly."

"You want me to stay?"

"Yes, I do want you to stay with me, or I will go with you."

"This is only a mood—to show your own power. When I come back, in six months, then we shall see."

"Six months? And I am to wait. No, thank you. You will have lost me for ever then. Oh! you are cruel."

"You are mistaken; I am not cruel. We have tried our experiment, and it has failed for me—for you, perhaps it is what you wanted. It will be all the better for you if I am not here. They—the all-powerful—will say less about you, if you are decently careful. Have you seen anything of Launa? Perhaps you will be good to her."

"To Launa? What is she to you?"

"My friend. You cannot understand that. I—"

"A man is never the friend of a woman."

"You have no friends then?"

"I—I am different. Why should I console her for your departure? Is she broken-hearted?"

"No," he replied. "Why will you misunderstand me?"

"Isn't it enough for her to have Mr. Wainbridge, and to stay at hotels with him alone."

"Take care what you say, and what you insinuate. Launa is perfectly innocent, she never stayed at an hotel—that is, lived with Mr. Wainbridge as you suggest. Someone may have seen them dining together. You dine with men sometimes. But I must go now."

She walked up and down in front of him. She was like a panther, with the same quick, nervous, gliding steps, and she was raging. She wore a tea-gown; he had once admired it. The light accentuated her piercing eyes, her mocking red lips.

"I shall not come to you until you send for me," he said.

"And I shall never send for you. Marriage is a mistake. You believe all they say of me. I have never kissed any man but you, I did love you, I might love you if—"

"Your virtue in not kissing men is wonderful, but they may kiss you. I believe nothing about you, nor in your love for me, nor for anyone."

"Daily life is so absorbing, the fine dust sifts in and deadens all feeling," she said sadly.

"Does it? Well, now I must say good-bye."

He took her hand.

"I trust you always. I cannot stay in this way. It is best for me to go and to forget."

And so he left her.

She threw herself down on her sofa and buried her face in the cushions. "Best to go and to forget—to go and to forget." This was the reward of a Regenerator of Matrimony.

That night Mrs. Herbert went to a dance. The waltzes all seemed to be played to the measure of a train—every minute took him further away—in intervals, when she was not talking, she composed letters which she never sent, and she hated herself for having let him go. Where was her power? Had she lost it?

She tried to use it on Sir Ralph, and the result more than justified her expectations.

"You deserve a good scolding," said Mr. George, when he asked for a dance and she refused to give it to him. "You are eating your cake now. I hope it is bitter. Jack has gone."

Sir Ralph went home with her, but he did not go in, as she shook hands by the lift and thanked him in an absent-minded, perfunctory way. Then she went to her room and wept.

She was a fool. It was all too horrible. The next morning life was not worth living, it was black and dreary. Excitement and Sir Ralph were all she had left. She was jealous of the unknown, of Jack's gladstone bag, and of his boots, of everything; and then she remembered Launa, and she was jealous of her. It was quite delightful to find a person to hurt, someone tangible at whom to throw speeches. Mrs. Herbert resolved to rise early, and go to see Launa.

Meanwhile Captain Carden's remarks and suggestions had an effect. Mr. Wainbridge noticed it—men looked coldly or with a certain amount of curiosity at him—some women turned the other way, others were interested. He did not realise the meaning of this, until Mr. George brought it before him. Mr. George was by no means one of the crowd. He knew Launa well; it was doubtful whether she had refused him or not. He adored Sylvia now. He frequented Launa's abode, scolded her when she appeared weary, and forbade her to sit up late. By this time people said that Miss Archer and Mr. Wainbridge had spent a week in Paris together, as Mr. and Mrs. Claude.

Mr. Wainbridge heard this tale in silence, and at the end he expressed himself as anxious to horsewhip the whole town. Mr. George reminded him that the town is large, and chiefly composed

of women.

"Damn them," said Mr. Wainbridge, briefly but expressively.

"That relieves your feelings," said Mr. George, "and is of no other avail. You must be accepted or refused by Launa sooner than you meant to be."

"But she will not do either—and if she hears or guesses—she will be hard to manage. Don't you suppose I would have married her long ago, if she would have had me?"

"You have been prolonging the joys of uncertainty—an engagement is an uncertain certainty—marriage is a certain uncertainty. It has claims, sure and everlasting I know, but they are unattractive."

Launa was rearranging her books when Mr. Wainbridge called to see her after this conversation.

"I feel particularly depressed to-day," she said, "so I am clearing up. That will produce a halo of virtue. I have tidied my work basket, and arranged my music. Now I will play to you."

She went to the piano and began to play. It was something strong and full of power—urging, urging what seems to be the search for happiness—on and on—like life—it went full of longings and regrets, until suddenly a clear still melody rang out, the Never Never country at last.

Mr. Wainbridge went over to her. The music thrilled him.

"How beautifully you play!"

He looked down at her. She was young, strong, beautiful, and a wild feeling for her swept over him; all the love and passion that was in the music seemed to be one with him. He loved her, loved her, loved her, and he had kept it down. It had never held full sway; not until this day had he felt quite powerless to control himself. She must be his. The longing of weeks and days engulfed him, and he tried to speak.

"Dearest—Launa. I love you. God forgive me, I love you more than my soul."

He fell on his knees beside her, his head in his hands.

"Don't," she said, "don't," putting out her hand. There was aversion in her voice.

"What, don't love you? That is impossible. I beg you, I pray you to give me your love. Trust me, help me."

"My love. Oh! love—what is it? Listen, I cannot tell you what I feel. . . . I do not love you. I am at peace when I am with you—I trust you; that is all."

"And you will always." He took her hand and kissed it. "My beautiful lady, you are mine, *mine*. How can I be glad enough?"

"Don't be . . . anything."

"Do you love me?"

"I trust you. I do not want you to kiss me."

He laughed a little.

"What is love?" she asked.

"Madness."

"Peace," she replied.

"Yes, peace. Oh! my dearest, with you, peace."

He rose from her side. She let her hands go over the keys, playing snatches of things. The prelude to tea appeared, the table and the cloth.

Mr. Wainbridge walked to the window, and Launa was playing "Warum." "Das bange bittere Warum," with its ceaseless unanswered questions. It was one of the things she had always played and felt she had not understood. Through what a century of emotions she had gone, and "Warum" brought her back. She understood it now as she never had done before.

She had been drifting down a rapid quiet stream, hurrying past the old landmarks, soothed by the swift dark water, lulled by its swirl, and rush, comforted by Mr. Wainbridge's care of her and for her. Now she was out on the sea, the broad sea of love, with its indefiniteness. She had awakened with a start to find herself there; to know that he loved her and wanted to marry her, and she also knew that to turn back was impossible.

"I am so happy, my darling," he said, turning round as he spoke. "I have loved you for so long, and I have feared."

"Feared what?"

"I feared you. That you did not care, and you do not care as I do."

"No," she replied; "I do not, I cannot care as you do. Why is it? I want to, and I want to remember only you. Only I can't, I can't."

"You do not want to remember the old life?"

"I want to forget everything, everyone. Listen, I must tell you—I don't want to marry you, because I cannot bear it, because I've once loved—" she stopped; he waited—"I once loved someone else. I think he is dead to me—but I know if he were to call me I would go, even if I married you and he came. I have forgotten him sometimes, but it all comes back again and again."

"I will make you love me—he is dead; he will never come. You will marry me, you will? Promise—you can't draw back now."

"I promise to marry you? I cannot forget so soon—"

"You promise?"

"Yes. Now you will have tea?"

"Mrs. Herbert," said the maid.

"How are you?" cried Launa, with joy. An interruption just then was most convenient. "You have not been here for so long."

Mr. Wainbridge could have borne a longer absence with philosophy. He gave Mrs. Herbert one glance, and looked again. She was looking handsome and flushed, yet the emotion which plainly affected her savoured not of joy nor of peace.

"I have not been here since you—how long is it since you were away?" said Mrs. Herbert. "Did you enjoy yourself? What were you doing? Skating?"

"It seems so long ago," said Launa. "To-day has been so warm. Who could believe we have ever

skated?”

“Yes, who?” inquired Mrs. Herbert. “The ice has gone, and the skate-marks are melted; there is no track on the water.”

“I hear Herbert has gone to Cairo,” said Mr. Wainbridge.

“Has he?” asked Launa. “How horrible for you.”

It is a wife’s duty to feel horribly something at her husband’s departure for Egypt or Hong-Kong, and Launa expressed the proper sympathy in her voice.

“He did not tell you?” asked Mrs. Herbert.

“No,” answered Launa.

“He did,” said Mrs. Herbert, with some excitement.

She had refused tea.

There was silence. Mr. Wainbridge glanced at Launa. His look infuriated Mrs. Herbert, whose anger threatened to become quite beyond her power of control.

“I came to-day, Launa, to tell you that I will no longer know you. You have poisoned my husband’s mind against me, and a girl who goes to the country and stays alone there with a man, under his name, as his—well, I leave the name to you.”

Mr. Wainbridge jumped up. Launa grew scarlet—bright, flaming red, up, up, into her hair. Mrs. Herbert was mad with anger; she wanted a whip, to hear it lashed, to make a noise with it, and hurt somebody. She clenched her hands violently.

“Miss Archer has just promised to be my wife,” said Mr. Wainbridge, “and she would prefer you left us. As for me, I hope you will never come into her house again; you certainly never shall enter mine.”

He rang the bell.

“Bah!” said Mrs. Herbert. “Virtue is not always triumphant. You made him love you—you took him from me!”

“Open the door for Mrs. Herbert,” said Mr. Wainbridge to the maid.

Mrs. Herbert rose.

“Your announcement is rather late. You may as well marry her—now.”

“What does she mean?” asked Launa, in a bewildered way. She had risen and stood in front of Mr. Wainbridge, her eyes on his face. “Do they say things about me? Do they?”

He did not answer her question. He had nothing to say.

Launa heard a step and turned round quickly to see if Mrs. Herbert were returning.

“Paul! Paul!” she cried. There was joy in her voice which Mr. Wainbridge had never heard in it before. “Oh, Paul!” She moved quickly towards him and gave him her hand. “I am so glad, so glad. When did you come? Why did you not come long ago?”

Mr. Wainbridge inspected Paul Harvey during this crisis. He was brown, strong, and lithe; standing by him Mr. Wainbridge appeared weak, effeminate.

“This is Mr. Wainbridge,” said Launa.

She wished him just then at Cairo or anywhere else.

“How do you do?” said both men.

“Miss Archer has just promised to marry me.”

He wore an air of ownership and went nearer Launa. There was a slight degree of defiance in his attitude.

“I congratulate you,” said Paul; “you are very lucky. The most fortunate of men.”

“Sit down,” said Launa, with a smile at Paul which Mr. Wainbridge endeavoured to imagine was merely kind. Launa assured herself that hers was the smile of a married woman to some brother of whom she is fond. “Tell me about home, about ‘Solitude,’ about the canoe, and the rivers.”

They talked, while Mr. Wainbridge listened, not uninterested, but surprised. Launa was new, different. Paul had introduced another element into the game—an element of doubt.

“But I shall win,” thought Mr. Wainbridge; “she has promised.”

“I have known Paul for years,” said Launa, turning to Mr. Wainbridge, as if to explain the situation, and he knows all about the land I dwelt in and my old home.”

This explanation was as much for Paul as for Mr. Wainbridge, and also for herself. She was convinced now of good reasons for her joy.

The returned traveller’s welcome was delightful to Paul more than he had dared hope for, less than that for which he longed, though to be received as the friend of the family was not his only aspiration. It was the stone instead of the bread, the hand of fellowship instead of the kiss of passion. He left Mr. Wainbridge with Launa, no doubt waiting for his kiss. Paul winced at the idea, and he was dining with the Canadian Commissioner.

But Mr. Wainbridge did not kiss Launa—he left her alone. She threw herself down on the sofa. The idea of marriage had appealed to her as a narcotic. Paul’s coming had changed it into a scourge. He was here; perhaps the girl was dead! She flushed with joy, then hid her face with shame. Perhaps he did not love her, had never loved her, and she belonged to Mr. Wainbridge. Paul had found her—and it was too late.

CHAPTER XV

The winter passed quickly—spring came, a soft, slow, gentle coming. Paul Harvey was a constant visitor at Victoria Mansions.

Sometimes he was there when Mr. Wainbridge was not, and then that was a “white day.”

Mr. Wainbridge found Paul’s appreciation of Launa gave life a zest—it added uncertainty and

attractiveness, though *he* intended to win. A man can appropriate another man's wife for walks and talks with much greater ease than he can the girl the other man is going to marry. But Mr. Wainbridge was enduring an amount of worry and annoyance about his uncle's affairs, and he was not free, while Paul was. Mr. Wainbridge never connected him with the someone Launa had loved—was he not dead? Had she not implied as much, more than once?

Paul had promised to remain in England until Launa's marriage; the indefinite prolongation was therefore borne by him with a placid demeanour. He also had been requested to give her away—there is a certain amount of excitement in giving "this woman to this man," when longing to keep her oneself, a form of death on the battlefield. Paul liked it as well as a man can like anything he dreads and detests, and yet with the feeling that he would not like another man to do it.

The April day was lovely. Paul was at Victoria Mansions, ready to do what Launa wanted, hoping Mr. Wainbridge might not come.

"I want to go out," she said; "to go far away, where I can paddle and see the catkins on the trees and listen to the sound of the river. I cannot stay at home and practise or do anything. I must go out."

" 'Let me taste the old immortal indolence of life once more,' " he quoted.

"Come," she said.

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

They drove to Paddington, and then went by train.

The river was looking lovely—ruffled and irregular—the trees wore a wind-swept fluffy look. The grass was fresh and green; it was spring, and all was new.

"This is glorious," she said, as she paddled up the stream.

The movements of her lithe body were beautiful to him—to her the motion and spring of the canoe were splendid, as it answered every stroke and went through the rippling water with a hiss and a rush.

"The lift of the long red swan," he said.

"Don't," she replied. "How he loved it! How he loved that life!"

"And will you never come back to it?"

"I do not know. Afterwards, perhaps—yet no, never."

"The Indians miss you. Mrs. Abram and Mrs. John often ask me about you. In the winter there is no one to be good to them."

"I sent them money and blankets," she answered. "I did all I could."

"They want *you*. Mrs. Andrew gave me a charm to bring you back. 'A little medicine yer know—a love potion of herbs.' "

She laughed.

"Is life here successful?" he asked. "Do you like it?"

"Yes, for some things I do. I came full of plans, and I have learned and worked. Now I am going to be married."

"You have, then, been successful?"

"I have learned that life is cruel."

"To you?"

"They, my friends, believed evil of me. Did you hear it?"

"I heard it."

"And believed?"

"Don't ask me such questions," he replied. "You know I could not believe them. I think you—well, I think you the purest, best woman in the world."

"That is not what you were going to say. You began and you changed it."

"You were cruel once, but you are the one woman—for me."

"Tell me about the lakes and the woods; I long to see them, to feel the air, and to smell the pines," she said quietly.

They paddled on and on, sometimes talking; and it seemed like a triumphal journey into a far-away world, with the sun and the rippling water, glorious movement and peace, and, above all, it was perfect because they were alone together, and away from the rest of the world.

Paul made no pretence to himself of not knowing why he was happy and why he was miserable—happy while with Launa, miserable when away from her—while the knowledge that she belonged to someone else was always obtruding itself.

And Launa? To her Paul meant the old life (so she assured herself with great frequency), her father, the Indians, the woods—everything she loved. She was glad to have Paul with her. It was a good ending to the chapter of singleness. And though perhaps it was not quite as she would have liked to have planned things, perhaps all would be for the best. The present was full of joy, the future—she could not bear to think of it—would be blank.

"How long have you been in England?" she inquired at last.

It was odd she had never asked this question before.

"I spent two months here in the summer, then I had to go home. My cousin, Jim Harvey—you remember him?"

"I never heard of him."

"I thought you knew all about him. He got himself mixed up in some row with the Indians, and so I went back. There was an Indian girl, too; he should have married her."

"And his name was Harvey?"

"Yes, Jim Harvey. He has married the girl. The worst of it is she is far too good for him, and he will lead her a terrible life; but I suppose it is best. You saw her once at that picnic at Paradise that night I shot the horse. Do you remember?"

"I remember. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you knew. I thought that was what you meant—"

“No,” she answered. “I meant—never mind now what I meant.”

She put down her paddle.

“I am tired. You can paddle back,” she said wearily. “It is time to go home. Sylvia is coming to dinner, and so is Mr. George.”

She was kneeling in the bow with her back to him.

“Launa, will you move? You will be more comfortable if you do, and I will keep her steady,” he said. “We shall soon get back.”

“I cannot move, I am so tired.”

She almost gave a sob. Suddenly she felt impotent and weary. His explanation had made it worse, and she ached with the hopelessness of it all.

He paddled into the bank, got out, and pulled the canoe in sideways; then he arranged the cushions for her in the middle.

“Now, get out while I hold the canoe, and sit there where I can see you. Light of my eyes,” he added in a whisper, but she heard it.

He gave her a hand, put a rug over her, and asked:

“Are you comfy?”

But she could not speak, and they started again.

The lift and sweep of the paddle, and the smooth regularity thereof, were soothing.

“Oh, the sorrow of the world!” she said. “It is unavailing. The awful mistakes, the terrible partings—it is too dreadful. When did you come back to London?”

“In December.”

“Why did you not come to see me before—in the summer?”

“Because I did not know your address—is that reason enough?—and I was rather afraid of you. I could not come.”

“Sylvia is my only woman friend.”

“You imagine that.”

“I do not imagine it; but I do not care.”

At dinner that night they were an uneven number.

“We must all go in together,” said Launa. “Sylvia, come with me.”

She put her hand on Sylvia’s arm and they went first.

Mr. Wainbridge came last; he wore depression ostentatiously until after the soup, and asked if they believed in ghosts.

“In ghosts,” inquired Mr. George. “In some ghosts. Do you believe in them?”

“Launa does,” said Mr. Wainbridge.

“I wish I could,” she answered.

“Did you ever see one?” asked Paul.

“One Sunday—it was a hot Sunday in July,” related Mr. Wainbridge, “we were going to Lady Blake’s, and Launa said she saw one.”

“One what?” asked Paul.

“One ghost.”

“What did she do?”

“She said it was dead. Are ghosts ‘it’?” inquired Mr. Wainbridge.

“When people die they become ‘it,’ ” said Mr. George. “They cannot—do not love. A man or a woman is neuter when love is over—when it is impossible.”

“They are maligning you, Launa,” said Sylvia, with a smile. A poet had written lines on her smile and called it divine. “Contradict them.”

“I did see a ghost,” she answered.

“Ghosts are indigestion,” said Mr. George slowly. “Have you read the new book, Miss Cooper?”

“Whose new book?”

“It is by an unknown author who writes of the love of a married man for some other woman. We know so much now, everyone writes of life’s miseries; if they would only write of happiness.”

“How wrong for a man to love the other woman,” said Sylvia.

“Wrong,” repeated Mr. George; “not at all; how unavoidable!”

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“How did they end it or begin it?” asked Sylvia.

“I hate a man who does nothing,” said Launa. “Love is either a secondary consideration or the passion of a moment to them. We are merely adjuncts—minor adjuncts.”

“Chromatic scales,” said Mr. George.

Paul ate his dinner with resolution. Launa was flushed—no doubt by the breeze on the river, and it was very becoming. She was not a minor adjunct.

Sylvia had grown grey looking.

She pushed away her plate quickly, and when Launa with her was leaving the room, Launa said:

“Do not hurry into us. We are so happy together and have so much to say.”

The men talked with indifference. They were anxious to go to the drawing-room. Mr. George at last said impatiently:

“Come on. I am tired of sport.”

With a conversation thereupon had they concealed their anxiety to be gone. Sport is absorbing.

In the drawing-room Sylvia, Paul Harvey, and Mr. George entertained each other.

Launa sat by the window and was talked to by Mr. Wainbridge.

“Paul and Sylvia. Paul and Sylvia. Paul and Sylvia,” sounded with dreadful monotony in her brain. She went to the piano and played “Warum.”

“How you have changed!” said Mr. Wainbridge. “Sometimes I feel as if I did not know you.”

“Are you tired of me?”

“Launa darling! tired—no, never. You are more uncertain in your moods—you are more

fascinating. I never know what you will do next. To-day has been long without you."

"Women take an age to learn that game killing would have no attraction for men if the game walked up to be killed willingly."

"Where have you been to-day, my dearest?" he asked, taking no notice of her speech.

"On the river with Paul. And you?"

"I have been very busy and worried."

"I am sorry. Worry is detestable."

"Yes," he replied, "and never ending."

"Your aunt is still odd?"

"Very odd. She is terrible sometimes. Talk of to-morrow, dear."

"I am going to see Sylvia."

Mr. Wainbridge looked at her.

"Did you mind what I said about the ghosts? There are none between you and me?"

"Ghosts? no, none."

"And so I may not come here to-morrow?"

"No. The next day you may."

Paul spent the evening talking to Sylvia. He left early. Mr. George and she were alone.

"Why are you so silent?" he asked at last.

"Am I? I was thinking."

"Of what I said at dinner?"

"What did you say?"

"Now you are offended."

"I am very fond of dark blue serge," said Sylvia, "very, and it is so becoming."

"What has that to do with what I said at dinner?"

"How can I tell what you said at dinner? Did you know I have a sister, Mr. George? She lives in Eaton Square and is very respectable, which means she does not work for her living, and is never in an omnibus after four. I seldom visit her; the Square and her surroundings satisfy her."

"And you told me this?" asked Mr. George.

"To interest you."

"I see, I understand," he answered.

"We need not decide yet what we shall do," said Lady Blake.

"Nor do it," said Mrs. Herbert. "I hate doing things."

"Still it is necessary for someone to take notice of Miss Archer's behaviour, now that she is engaged to Mr. Wainbridge."

"They do not talk of being married," said Lily, with a laugh.

Lady Blake was having tea with her, it was hot and June. They were both dressed in crepon and muslin. Lady Blake's hat was a flower garden.

Mrs. Herbert looked bored. The heat was excessive, and she was weary.

Jack wrote to her occasionally, but he did not return, and she was tired of Sir Ralph. Other people were also afflicted in the same way, and Mrs. Herbert was often left out where before she had been first.

Women said her first husband had been an angel, and died to continue one, and her second went to Cairo.

Sir Ralph was beginning to take too much for granted, and he had no mind—pink books and papers of a light and airy kind were his literature. Mrs. Herbert had been intellectual when desirous of attracting Jack, and, after her long acquaintance with Sir Ralph, she told him that old families are becoming ignorant and corrupt.

"Have you seen Launa's voyageur?" asked Lady Blake.

"Who is he? Have I seen him?"

"An indefinite relation of hers. Have you read the *Signal* this week? I have not."

"Here it is. Look at it now."

"Listen, listen," said Lady Blake. " 'At the Duchess of Oldharris' small evening party Miss Archer looked particularly well in white and black. She delighted everyone with her playing of 'Warum.' She has been in mourning for some time for her father, and has been much missed by society!' "

Lady Blake put down the paper with slow concern.

"The Duchess of Oldharris, the *Duchess*," she said. "My musical party next week! When does your husband return?"

"I do not know."

"Soon? I cannot think that it is good for you—or for him—to stay away so long."

"Probably not," said Lily. "Do you always do what is good for you? I have no doubt Cairo disagrees with him intensely."

"I would go out to him if I were you," said Lady Blake. "Your honeymoon was in that Surrey garden. How blissful it was that day I called upon you, but how short a time it lasted! You were sewing; you never sew now. Not even a little shirt like Becky Sharp."

"The days are no longer perfect, as they were during my honeymoon," said Mrs. Herbert, "though it is June."

"You must have been misinformed," said Lady Blake.

"Oh, no, it was June, I assure you. One does not forget that."

"I mean about Launa. The Duchess is so particular, and it happened so long ago. Good-bye, dear."

She rustled away to call at the House for her husband.

Next day Launa received an invitation for the musical party—she was even asked to play. She refused that honour.

CHAPTER XVI

Sylvia had become necessary to Launa, who had at first used her as a screen, for Mr. Wainbridge was there always, and with Sylvia present naturally there were no demonstrations.

Paul made his appearance only a degree less frequently—Launa did not mind being alone with him. He was waiting in London for her wedding day, for which no date was appointed, and Paul was not anxious to arrange this.

Sylvia talked to Paul when Mr. Wainbridge was in possession, and it occurred to Launa that Sylvia was very attractive—probably Paul thought this also.

In these days Launa felt that meditation and thought were unprofitable; she turned to Sylvia for something, not for protection, but for companionship. Sylvia was restless, Launa was restless also; the days were unsatisfactory if one hour were unoccupied. A day of inaction was Launa's present idea of torment. Sylvia and she agreed on this subject.

One night Launa had come in very tired; too tired to eat. She drank some chocolate, and sat in the music-room.

Mr. Wainbridge appeared. It was late, and he had been at his uncle's. The room was full of poppies; the heavy odour was oppressive, and the flowers were falling—slowly, slowly they tumbled down every few minutes.

"They are the ghosts of the past," said Launa at last, as one or two flowers fell simultaneously, and yet as it were with reluctance. "Do you hear the slow sound they make as they fall? I am very tired."

"Your tea-gown is like moonlight, and you look divine."

"And unearthly? I would rather be human."

"You are lovely."

"Tell me something new," she replied, with a laugh of confidence, and a look—"something that I do not already know."

"What have you been doing to-day?" he asked, feeling the commonplace safe.

"I went with Sylvia to see a woman who is dying—and yet it is not certain she will die—to die is peace."

"She was suffering. Why did you go, dearest? It is not fit for you to see such things."

"That is the cry of the whole world," she replied, getting up and moving the flowers near her. "Why go? Why see it? Peace, peace, and there is no peace."

"You cannot help her."

"You are right, I am powerless, and I have promised to send her jelly. Ridiculous! Jelly!"

"Who is she?"

"Her name was Bertram. She was once pretty and sang well. Sylvia knew her. Some man made love to her, and promised her the usual things. She left her work for him, and because of him, and he left her alone. She has starved, frozen, and been half-murdered, yet she lives."

"I cannot help thinking, dear, that it was her fault, too. A woman does not—should not yield."

"A woman wants to love and to be loved. . . . Then," she added, "I could never love a man who would promise and never keep it."

"To promise," he repeated. "What is a promise? It is an impossibility. I promise to love someone for ever. You will some day—may it be soon?—promise to cleave to me only. I cease to love someone—the promise is broken. I am not responsible. Who is? You promised me once you would not go out alone when it is dark, and you do not keep it."

"What is love? When I cannot keep my promise of cleaving to you, will you blame me? You say the keeping of promises is impossible. I never promised to love you."

"*Blame* you? No. You love me—do you love me?—and women, thank God, are mostly constant."

"Thank God," she repeated.

She did not answer his question—to seek to acquire information was most simple.

"Love is all things—the joy of life—the sting of death," he said.

"Friendship is a joy, too. It is like autumn after the midsummer heat is over. Do you not know the peace and stillness of a clear autumn day? There is a blue sky, and merely a suspicion of cold in the air. You know the air on a lake coming over a long sweep of country."

She paused.

"There is a chill about autumn—a suspicion of indifference."

"No, no," she answered quickly. "What is the most perfect relationship in this world? Which is the happiest?"

"Who can tell? To me it is you; to you it is—I wish I could feel sure the stone of happiness you seek for is my love."

She did not answer immediately.

"The stone of happiness when one finds it is still a stone. How can a stone bring happiness?"

"Your ring—to see the sapphire brings me happiness," he answered.

He felt of late an intangible something between them—as if he were fighting with the powers of the air, with unknown forces—would he win, or they? The dead are quiet for ever, and yet something seemed to come between him and Launa. Do the dead watch over those they love? Mr. Wainbridge shivered; he was sometimes superstitious.

Paul was not an acquiescent lover, and since his day in the canoe with Launa he had pondered long and frequently. Was she happy? No; nor was he.

One afternoon when with her, like an inspiration it came to him that he was master. He would not give in, he loved her; love was power, and she did not love Mr. Wainbridge, of that he was sure.

Launa was alone.

They talked for some moments, the conversation was led by her to Newfoundland, but he took no interest in that.

“When are you going to be married?” he asked.

“When? I know not. Talk of something else.”

“I will talk about you. It is of no use for you to change the subject. I love you, love you, and you are mine. You have no right to marry anyone but me. You belong to me.”

Paul was as a god, knowing not merely good and evil, but love and light.

“It is my kisses you will long and hunger for, my arms which should be round you, not his.”

He looked at her. She had started when he began.

“His never are,” she said, while she longed to ask how he knew this, but she felt to acknowledge he knew was to acknowledge him right.

“You won’t let him now, but his arms will be round you. There is no escape from them once you are married. Think how you will feel when he is with you always, and you can never get away. You will see my face when his is close to you, you will feel—”

“Paul! Paul!”

“You would like to say, ‘Why persecutest thou me?’ They say girls often marry from ignorance and wish they had not. Launa, you will not be ignorant. Without love marriage is a loathsome Hell; with it, darling, it is Heaven. Such a Heaven! You are mine, as much mine as if five priests had read hundreds of words over us. Give him up! give him up!”

“I wish I could die, knowing you love me.”

“I would rather see you dead than his wife.”

“Paul, I love you.”

She held out her hands.

“My darling; my darling. How I love you. And you will give him up?”

She stood still, her eyes raised to his; hers were full of trouble, his full of love. He would face the world and count the loss of all things nothing for her. His was a love worth having, and he was brave and true, worthy of love. He came nearer. He had not touched her.

“Come to me, Launa.”

She turned and let him fold her in his arms, such strong arms.

“You take away my individuality. You are a brute, Paul. Let me look into your eyes; they are true. It is your eyes I see when I talk to him, your voice I hear, your kisses I feel. . . . Paul, don’t tempt me. I have degraded myself enough. Leave me—go. I am wicked, I am wrong.”

“Tempt you? My God, Launa! Am I not tempted?”

“When you hold me I am strong. A woman loves a man who has a strong arm for her.”

He bent down and kissed her face, then her lips, a long, long kiss.

“Launa, can you marry any other man? Be true, dear.”

“Sit down, Paul, by me. Let me hold your hand. I feel so weak and so afraid. And when you have gone and I am alone with him. . . . You know I love you. . . . But I have promised myself to him. I cannot break my word. I can ask him to give me up. I will do that.”

“You must tell him you cannot marry him. Why should one man insist on making three people miserable? For he will not be happy. I shall not leave you now until you have promised to marry me. I kiss you, I hold you, I take you.”

He lifted her in his arms and carried her to a sofa.

He put pillows under her head and knelt beside her.

“You cannot get up. I will not let you go—you must rest.”

“Paul!”

He kissed her.

“Launa, if you could know, could guess how I hunger for you. How I dream of you and long for you until the day is a long dreary reality, and night is life when I see you and hear your voice—gentle and soft—I love your voice. In my dreams I hold you in my arms.”

“Paul, you forget that I have promised. I have given myself to him.”

“You mean?”

“My word to him. How can I take it back?”

“Easily; by not keeping it.”

They both laughed, and so Mr. Wainbridge found them when he entered the room.

“Is Launa ill?” he asked, in well-bred tones of surprise.

She felt she hated him; his upper lip was too long, his manner too unctuous, and his shoulders were so round.

He glanced from Paul to Launa, and it seemed to him as if his appearance were just what was required to turn the scale in his own favour. She sat up. Paul put a cushion behind her and kissed her hand. Mr. Wainbridge advanced with disapproval and another cushion, which Launa refused with mild gratitude.

The men glared at each other. Mr. Wainbridge was uneasy, Paul triumphant.

“Shall I stay, Launa?” said Paul.

“No; I have a headache,” she said.

Paul left the room, and Mr. Wainbridge waited in silence.

“I hope you are better,” he said, at last.

“I have something to tell you.”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“You must hear it.”

“Look here, Launa, I know what you are going to say. You are going to say . . . what you will regret. Something about Mr. Harvey. I mean to marry you; you have promised. That is all.”

“You do not consider me responsible for my feelings; you have said it.”

“For your feelings, no; but for your promises, yes.”

“Suppose I have changed?”

“Suppose you never felt what you promised; suppose it was merely a refuge from loneliness, from—”

“Well, suppose it was,” she answered. “But I never promised to feel anything—simply to marry you.”

“What do you want me to do now?” he asked.

“I want you to set me free.”

“Never, never. To do that would be ruin for me.”

They faced each other; she was excited, flushed—with a new look of a half-born, half-understood joy. He was sullen.

“Why—tell me why? You could not hold me to my bargain—unwillingly.”

“It would be ruin for me to release you. My uncle would cut me off—leave me nothing, and give me nothing, if you or I break off our engagement. He has heard several things about me—things which—well, I have told you enough. Darling, you would not, you could not ruin me. I love you so intensely. Think of my life, my prospects, without you!”

“To live without me.”

“What could I do?”

The joy had left her face—the flush was gone. She was pale, and her face looked haggard.

“Go, go. I will not ruin your prospects and devastate your life—go. But you must leave me alone now. Yes, I hate you.”

He went to his Club. On the way he meditated writing a novel or a play—his inventive powers were so great. He had impressed Launa—she believed him. He had constructed the first chapter when he reached his Club.

Launa went for a long drive.

Paul was defeated. That night he received this note.

“We have made a mistake, you and I.
Forget it. It is too late. Remember only
your promise to stay until my wedding.

“L.”

CHAPTER XVII

Lady Blake had started evening receptions, and once a fortnight she was at home. She had some idea of founding a *salon*, but her ignorance of the necessary steps was appalling. She thought it would have something to do with school-books and asking questions on abstruse subjects.

Launa went frequently, and took Sylvia with her, who was now second leading lady in the new play “Some Cabbages and a Weed.” The interview in the *Signal* had been of much assistance to her career. Formerly she had an existence—now she had a career. Mr. George devoted himself to her. This evening they met at Lady Blake’s. Launa was quickly surrounded by her friends, by her enemies, and people who could be either, had they known her. She was charming—the self-possession of a duchess, combined with the amiability and cleverness of the unknown woman wishing to be successful.

Mr. George was amusing them by relating the triumphs of the interviewer.

He had been the one to hear the aims and aspirations of the newest “Lady Temperance Lecturer.”

“Is she a Lady Temperance Lecturer?” he asked, “or a Temperance Lady Lecturer? The last way sounds as if one might suspect her of imbibing, and a Lady Temperance Lecturer does not sound—well, is nice the word? Women like that word; it expresses untold things to them, daintinesses and pretty undergarments. To a man it means a woman does not bore him. He does not call his best beloved ‘nice’ merely—angels are not nice.”

“Tell me about the Temperate Lady,” said Launa.

“I think Temperate Lady Lecturer would be a good name,” said Sylvia. “She might have an idea when to stop.”

“It was late,” said Mr. George, “when I interviewed her. She had been lecturing. Her window blinds were not down, and the moon shone in. There appeared to be much temperance in her mansion. We observed the moon with attention and in silence. After she had told me several details of her own life, ‘There is no water in the moon,’ she said, with a solemn air, ‘and nothing to drink. *The people in the moon have nothing to drink.*’ This whole sentence was in the largest of italics. I suggested that our best astronomers are in doubt as to the fact of human beings living in the moon. ‘Such a beautifully mountainous world,’ she said, ‘must be inhabited. Think of their Switzerland and of their Himalayas! They never have typhoid, for there is no water.’

“ ‘No drinks,’ I said. ‘Nothing to drink,’ she replied. ‘Not even the sea to bathe in, to picnic by in summer,’ I suggested. I won’t publish it all. I asked if the moon were fruitful, and she said, ‘Undoubtedly.’ Then I replied, ‘They are obliged to drink their brandy raw. If it is fruitful there must be grapes, if grapes, brandy’—you see the connection? ‘There is no water to make brandy,’ she observed. ‘Pardon me,’ I said, ‘you do not require water to make brandy only to dilute it, if you have temperance yearnings.’ She gasped, and I left her.”

“How glad she must have been,” said Launa, moving as she spoke to talk to Mr. Wainbridge’s cousin.

The rooms were becoming empty. Sylvia, Launa, Mr. Wainbridge, and Mr. George were standing together. The Member for Hackney joined Launa. He had developed an affection, nay, an inclination

towards her. He was too cold for affection; he admired her.

The Under-Secretary for the Home Department came up behind them.

“Bolton, have you heard?” he asked, and kept his eyes fixed on Launa. He might have kept his information to himself had not Mr. Bolton been occupied with her.

“What?” asked the Member for Hackney. He did not desire to know anything further. His interest in the Colonies, as exemplified by Launa, was absorbing.

She smiled at the Under-Secretary, who wondered if Mr. Bolton would leave her when he heard the news.

“There has been a skirmish somewhere in Africa, and Fairmouth is, the telegram says, dead. You are Lord Fairmouth. I thought you would like to hear it.”

He waited. Sylvia gave a sort of moan and put out her hands.

“I loved him,” she said.

The Member for Hackney started, and Launa said:

“Miss Cooper and I must go home. Mr. George, will you give her your arm? Hugh, you will get us our carriage?”

Mr. Bolton stayed by Launa; the Under-Secretary had vanished.

“So that is the girl,” he said; “I have heard of her. That was somewhat dramatic. May I not be of some use to you, Miss Archer? Shall I take you to Lady Blake? You will want to say good-night to her.”

He offered her his arm, and they found the hostess. Launa apologised for Sylvia. The Member for Hackney said she looked quite pale. Lady Blake suggested sal volatile, and expressed her great concern.

“I will come and see you to-morrow,” said the Member for Hackney, as he held Launa’s hand at parting. “I am much interested in the Colonies and in the New World.”

Mr. George stared after their carriage, then he lighted a cigarette. Mr. Wainbridge had disappeared.

“She has a blister on now,” said Mr. George, “I wonder if it will ever heal.”

Mr. Bolton nodded and said:

“Miss Archer is engaged to Mr. Wainbridge?”

“Yes,” replied George.

They walked away together.

“Sylvia, don’t try to talk,” said Launa, as they drove home.

“Let me alone,” she moaned. “I am a fool to break down. You cannot tell what a joy it has been to me to feel to be sure of his love. It was all I had—all—”

Launa left her alone, after giving her a brandy and soda.

Fortunately “Some Cabbages and a Weed” was over, and the theatre shut up. It would open with a new play in September. Sylvia had her part to study and could rest, but not with her mother.

Mrs. Cooper could not have believed her daughter was in trouble—trouble which she should not share. A mother’s heart is the resting and the confiding-place for her daughter. She forgot a mother’s tongue often prevents confidences. She would have labelled her daughter “lost” had she known.

Launa had decided on taking a house by the river—a cottage with drains and hot water, as well as roses!

Mrs. Cooper and Sylvia would come too. Launa hoped Mr. Bolton would not talk of this accident and betray Sylvia. She waited with apprehension for the morrow and the Member for Hackney.

Sylvia besought her to find out the circumstances.

“Find out if he is dead. How he died: when and where. Oh, God! It is torture! Torture! Find out all about him.”

Mr. Wainbridge, Mr. George, and Paul came next day. Launa dispatched them for particulars. There was nothing in the paper. Mr. Wainbridge went to the Club, Mr. George to his newspaper, and Paul to the High Commissioner for Canada. This was his first meeting with Launa since their day of confession. He asked for no further explanation and she gave none.

He returned in an hour. The High Commissioner had been gracious. It was said that Paul knew too much about him to allow of his being anything else. There were episodes; the lady was happily married, and the Commissioner was High. The news was confirmed—Lord Fairmouth was dead.

“I must tell her,” said Launa.

Paul went down to the cottage to inspect it and to order it to be immediately prepared for them.

In all this they had quite forgotten Mrs. Cooper.

The Member for Hackney arrived before tea. His business engagements were many, but he was in need of refreshment.

He found Launa in the music-room. He took her hand with sympathy. He knew how to express his emotion with the ease of a ladies’ doctor. Some people said he had no real emotions, only fictitious ones.

“What a charming room!” he said, as he viewed it and her with admiration. He changed his tone as he added, “How is she to-day?”

“Broken-hearted.”

“Ah! In what way?” His experience had not provided him with any symptoms of such a thing. “The defeat of a measure,” he began, when Launa interrupted him.

“Oh, Mr. Bolton, does anyone know? Did the other man tell of what happened last night?”

Fear of discovery is a woman’s broken heart, he made a note of it, while he answered:

“No one knows. You may be quite sure of that. I arranged it with my friend. You may tell Miss Cooper I am glad I can set her—mind at rest.”

He meant at first to say heart.

“She does not care, she does not think of that,” she answered. “She has not seen him for six

months . . . she loves him, he loved her . . . she made him leave her."

"Really!"

"It is terrible to hear her. She does not cry, she merely moans. . . . You will have some tea?"

"I would like some tea," he answered. "I am very tired."

He felt much refreshed. Miss Archer had discrimination, and evidently was a good housekeeper.

"You stay in town for some time?" he asked. "Miss Archer, are you not the hansom girl? Mr. George told me about it, I remember. It applies to you both with and without a 'd'."

She smiled, and did not thank him.

"I have taken a house at Shelton, and as Miss Cooper is so wretched I intend to take her there."

"She is related to you?"

"No; I am sorry for her. She is my friend."

"Ah, that is better. Will you not be sorry for me? I, too, am alone, and sometimes lonely."

She had never associated any frivolity with the Member for Hackney. He was one of those mysterious men who assisted in the governing of the country, and as such beyond much emotion. She looked at him.

"Do you need my sorrow?"

"I want it."

"We often want what we do not need. I want more tea, it is not good for me, I do not need it."

"Can I do anything to help you?"

"If you would. I had forgotten Mrs. Cooper, her mother. You could interview her for me. She may hear Sylvia is ill. I do not want her to come to see her daughter. Mrs. Cooper would believe you. She is an old lady who believes in a man's opinion."

" 'Man was made in the image of God.' She believes it still?"

"Yes," said Launa, "and she accepts with thankfulness ideas from any man."

"If she were a young woman this might be attractive and new. I will go to see this Adamite. What must I say?"

"Be indefinite."

"Headache and weariness for disease; absolute quiet and rest for the remedies," he replied. "I quite understand. May I come again? Above all I would like to be with you at Shelton."

"Do come. I should be so glad."

"I could wish you would not—could not express it so easily. Where does this lady live?"

"In the Fulham Road."

He sighed. The prospect of the long drive did not cheer him.

"You will take my brougham. I have ordered it for you."

"Thank you," he replied, and let his glance say more.

The Colonies were interesting. It was the year of new fishery arrangements with America and France. The Member for Hackney made a point of knowing all about them. He intended to ask Launa for information; he felt singularly elated at the prospect of seeing her again.

He was not particularly fond of fishing nor of bills, but information on all subjects was acceptable to him. He prided himself on knowing the views of the people for whom he was legislating.

CHAPTER XVIII

Shelton cannot be described; it lay along the river, near heavenly back waters, where reeds rustled, and the rushes sighed softly, and it was within reach of the woods.

They all went there, each one hiding their real feelings from the others, except Mrs. Cooper. Her feelings were described by the word blissful; she derived much satisfaction from the donning of her best dress every day. It was made of silk; in her youth a lady was dressed in nothing but silk. Driving every day with a footman, and having a maid to button her boots, completed her happiness. She never noticed her daughter's depression. Sylvia had recovered. She was more silent, just as good-looking, and Mr. George hovered about her with sympathy in his eye and with sorrowful attentions.

Mr. Wainbridge, Paul, and the Member for Hackney each felt the inhabitants of the cottage were under his special protection, and each one frowned at the frequent visits of the others.

Paul had received and accepted his invitation before he had told Launa to give up Mr. Wainbridge, and he came to Shelton. All was not yet lost. Mr. Wainbridge was obviously nervous. Launa looked unhappy. To her life in the country was a relief. Of late the strain on her mind had been trying. Paul's presence was a comfort to her, with an underlying feeling of torture, of the intolerableness of fate, life, destiny.

Mr. Wainbridge made continual demands on her feelings—demands which sometimes were hard, impossible to fulfil, especially that she should love him.

He was quite aware that he frequently asked for the impossible and obtruded himself in a way which was foolish, and before Paul he was often reckless. A mad joy because of his possession of Launa filled his mind, for he knew a mad anguish filled the breast of Paul Harvey.

To Launa Mr. Bolton was like an invigorating breeze after a hot day. He knew that she was appropriated. He expected scars from an intimacy with her, but they were worth it. He was waiting for news from Africa before formally becoming Lord Fairmouth. Meanwhile he forgot ambition and wandered about the fields with her, looking for mushrooms which he never saw, because he found her so much more delightful. She was original and charming, her voice was soft and low. Had it a sound of sadness or of joy? One day one thing, the next another. What was she—heart-whole, heart-divided, or only a woman without a heart?

Mr. Bolton found some amusement from the comedy—or was it a tragedy?—that was being played. He had no fear for his own emotions: they were pretty much the same as those possessed by the other two, and he kept them under excellent control. He sometimes wondered if ambition had any part in Miss Archer's plans. Would he, as Lord Fairmouth, have any chance? He enjoyed most of her society. Mr. Wainbridge's visits were uncertain, and whenever Paul and Mr. Bolton were there, Paul took Sylvia out in the canoe.

Mrs. Cooper fortunately discovered an ancient enemy living four miles away, and she drove with frequency and glory, because of the footman, to discuss the past and its joys. The enemy's joys were present ones. Together they found argument unconvincing and therefore agreeable.

It was Sunday.

They were all walking across the fields coming from church. Launa and Mr. Bolton were first; Mr. Wainbridge had been detained by his uncle at the church door. He caught up to Mrs. Cooper, who insisted on discussing the sermon—which was on "Eternal Damnation."

The preacher was staying at the Court—Lord Wainbridge's place—and was specially favoured by her ladyship, who had nodded with frequency and approval at each point to which he gave utterance, and which she considered reduced her husband to ashes here, and to flames hereafter. In her theology there was nothing so quiet and peaceful as ashes afterwards. But Lord Wainbridge had not observed these signs of approval. He regarded his nephew with attention, and Miss Archer with admiration. He looked at his wife—a faded unhealthy specimen of an aristocratic worn-out family, in black bombazine and a dowdy bonnet, and he thought of the other woman and of Launa. He observed her intently; her head well carried, and her hair well dressed, her pretty soft throat—he could not see her face, but she was certainly desirable, and he had never met her. So he stopped his nephew on his way to join Miss Archer, and suggested that Hugh should come over to the Court that afternoon.

Mr. Wainbridge listened to Mrs. Cooper's remarks in silence. He did not care about the sermon, but he did care for Launa's society, and she would spend the afternoon with Mr. Bolton or Mr. Harvey. He regretted he had not refused his uncle's invitation, but that gentleman had appeared so sad, so old, and Lady Wainbridge sniffed with such depressing regularity, that to have refused would have been cruel.

"I dislike that church," said Launa to Mr. Bolton. "It already makes me feel as if religion were contemptible and as if it were merely useful to occupy old women. I am sorry I went to it to-day."

"It would be very wrong and very radical of you to neglect your own church. A good Conservative always supports the institutions of his country," he said.

"That is the good of being women," she answered, looking at him with a mixture of friendship and mischief. "We are not allowed to vote, and we need not be a Conservative or anything, and as for the institutions of the country, I am not sure that I like them, or even know what they are."

"Marriage is one."

"With or without love? For love is not an institution."

"Sometimes; well, you know as well as I do that we can get on without love."

"Love," said Launa, "is *the* thing in life, it is—"

"What do you love?"

"Whom? What? I love life and movement—the wind and the sea. The being alive to-day is joy. Look at the grass, the river, the water! If I could only be at 'Solitude,' to smell the air as it comes across that sweep of woods!"

"To smell it alone?"

"Alone," she replied.

"You arrange life on a basis of love." He laughed. "It is not always fine. In winter the wind is cold and it shrieks unpleasantly; it is not warm like love—real love—and then there is success. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, but in a month or a year you would, I think, grow weary of your paradise alone."

"Why did you laugh?"

"At myself and your basis of love."

His philosophy kept him amused, because he was aware of his own foolishness. If there was a certain amount of pain in the laughter no one noticed it. The others caught up to them.

"I do not like that preacher," said Mrs. Cooper.

"He is one of my aunt's favourites," answered Mr. Wainbridge. "She says his descriptions of hell are so reviving for the sinner."

"So is lunch," said Launa, "and I am hungry."

After lunch Mr. Wainbridge followed Launa to her own sitting-room. He intended to conduct a parting. Emotions brighten the desert of life.

He put his arms round her.

"I like your necktie and your pin," she said.

"I will give you the pin."

He took it out and handed it to her.

"Here, dearest."

"Now go and sit there. It is too hot for—"

"You never kiss me or let me kiss you."

"I hate kissing—indiscriminate kissing."

"You will not always hate it," he answered. "I must go, I want to settle things with my uncle. You will accept their invitation to stay there?"

He found it best to forget the day she had asked him to set her free. She remembered it and his confession always.

"Not yet. I could not leave here until Mrs. Cooper and Sylvia go."

"You will have me with you there all day—it will be perfect."

“Nothing is perfect,” she answered. “You will be back—when?”

“After dinner. How I wish I could stay here now, but my uncle is so lonely. Good-bye.”

He put his arms round her gently and she let him—he stifled her, while he protected her. To suffer any embrace was unusual for her. He was still, glad to hold her. She was sorry he was leaving her; with him near, certain things were impossible—he was an anchor. But there was the rest of the afternoon and Paul.

“Institutions are good sometimes,” she said.

“That is obscure to me. Good-bye.”

And Launa sang a little song to herself:

> “Love light come, light go,
> Love light come, light go.”

As it was the fashion to observe love critically, with unbelief, she would do it too.

Paul came in at the window. He had a book in his hand.

“I am lonely,” he said. “May I stay? I never see you alone now, Launa.”

“Are the others all right? We will talk about the war. Where is Mrs. Cooper?”

“They are all asleep, Sylvia too. Bolton is writing letters, answering the bundle he got this morning. Wainbridge, thank Heaven, has gone to see his uncle.”

“Probably to arrange about our marriage.”

She seated herself opposite him and said this rather defiantly. She wanted to remember Mr. Wainbridge and her marriage.

“You are not married yet. . . . To-day is ours.”

“What shall we do now? You and I?”

“You and I,” he repeated, with joy. “Talk. Be glad we are together.”

“And can talk—about Canada.”

“Yes, about Canada,” he replied. “The products or the people?”

“The people,” she answered slowly.

“We will talk of the women.”

“Yes,” she said.

“About you, for you are a woman.”

“I wish I were not.”

“Why?”

“Because—because men have so much the best of it. . . . Do men like independent women? No, men like them clinging. What does a clinging woman do?”

“I don’t take the faintest interest in inscrutable women,” he replied. “Come out and sit among the pine trees and think of ‘Solitude’ and the lake—”

“And forget everything except *now* which is ours?” she said.

“Come then—come.”

CHAPTER XIX

The Court, the ancestral home of the Wainbridges, was purchased by the present owner’s father (with the furniture and the portraits) from a family whose possessions consisted of a very ancient title and many debts. Common sense was not included in their inheritance. That they could ever live with a plain cook and a house-parlourmaid and pay their debts never occurred to them.

The Court was built in a circular shape, with what Lady Wainbridge called “heathen pillars,” and a long flight of steps led up to the door. The gardens were beautiful and the flowers took prizes at shows. The house was dreary and not clean. The servants were celebrated for their piety, therefore other virtues were not required; most of them were “reclaimed.”

Lord Wainbridge was in the garden when his nephew arrived. Lady Wainbridge considered fresh air on Sunday a sin, except what little was imbibed when going to and from church in a brougham at eleven o’clock. She held a “Gospel Reunion” in the drawing-room after lunch, which her husband refused to attend.

For some time the two men admired the roses; they were late ones, and a new kind.

“I did not come to see Miss Archer,” said the elder man, “because you never asked me to do so. You made no formal announcement of your engagement to me.”

“Launa has been in mourning for her father. Nothing is settled—yet.”

“It will be soon? I am tired of this life,” said Lord Wainbridge. “I want to be free. I am going to make this place over to you, Hugh.”

His nephew started.

“To me? I cannot express my sense of your goodness to me.”

“Get married soon,” answered his uncle; “when there is an heir I shall feel happy. Your aunt dislikes the Court, and after you marry I shall not feel the need of being even respectable. I can live as I like.”

“You are too good to me. I cannot tell you what I feel.”

He felt his thanks were poor, stilted, and feeble, but he did not know how to express himself better.

“I should like to come and see Miss Archer.”

“Call her Launa,” said his nephew. . . . “You believe in marriage?”

“I believe in yours, of course, and in my own—we all believe in what is. Marriage exists—is it a failure? For individuals sometimes, for the many—no, I suppose not, for they still marry. You will be happy.”

“I hope so.”

“I admired Miss Archer—she is a living girl. Your aunt will also go to see her—I believe this week is a week of solitude and seclusion with your aunt, but afterwards she will go. You must prepare Miss Archer for some disagreeableness and loud prayers. Your aunt is afflicted in that way on these interesting occasions.”

“Yes,” said the other.

“I should like to have Launa here to stay for a few days; but I fear she might not be very happy. What is your opinion?”

“I will tell her. I am sure she will be grateful to you for all your kindness to us both, but—she is uncertain, and aunt Jane’s remarks might affect her.”

“Uncertain! She loves you? I felt sure when I saw her that it was love. Why is she uncertain?”

“I do not know . . . perhaps I am wrong. Girls often are . . . odd.”

“Sometimes I have hoped you would marry someone with a title, but I like that girl. I received the announcement of your engagement with indifference—it seemed to be only the binding of another man; but now—”

“You wish my marriage to take place soon? You feel as if it would leave you freer—”

“It would make you happier, and me also. I should not be backward about settlements.”

“My aunt may die, and you probably will marry again—”

Lord Wainbridge shook his head.

“No. I shall settle two thousand a year on Miss Archer. She has money, also, I understand?”

“You really desire my marriage?”

“Certainly.”

“Then I will arrange it as quickly as possible.”

“And I may come and see Launa?”

“My dear uncle, do not ask if you may. I am so grateful, more than grateful to you. I hope, and I am sure Launa will feel as I do, that you will make a second home with us.”

And so they parted.

For some days after his conversation with his uncle Mr. Wainbridge found that solitary discourse with his beloved was impossible. She eluded him, and his news grew stale and lost its power of delighting him. Launa had killed his triumph. She let him kiss her forehead sometimes, but they had no twilight walks and no talks.

Any reminder of their approaching marriage was received by her in silence, and he discovered that whereas formerly his love for a woman always cooled at the idea of the approach of matrimony—his pre-matrimonial love was but a star which paled before the heat and light of the rising hymeneal sun. *Now* his love was the sun, hot sun, which dried up and withered everything; it made his life one intense longing for her. His passion mastered him; everything was subservient to it. He was possessed by one idea, and longed to marry her and soon. He wanted her for his own—absolutely—body and soul. She did not love as he loved; he would kiss her into it—kiss her to know nothing but his love for her. Oh, God, that it should take so long, and need so much patience!

If Launa were only alone! There were Harvey and Bolton—and Paul he feared most of all. He was a prey to uncomfortably apprehensive thoughts, and all day long he had to talk of the garden or of croquet, while the sun of desire was burning him up, and the days were a weariness.

One day Launa was writing letters.

He came in.

“Allein,” he quoted, “zum ersten mal allein.”

She rose hurriedly and glanced at the door which he had shut. It was raining; the windows were closed.

“I am seriously thinking of looking after my affairs in Canada. It would be a long journey,” she said.

“In Canada?” he repeated. “What about your promise to me? Our marriage?”

“I thought you had forgotten about marriage. It is some time since we talked of love—we have talked very little about marriage.”

She undid her scent bottle on her chatelaine.

“Dearest,” he murmured, taking her hand while his heart beat tumultuously. He thought she was jealous, even though he knew she did not love him as he loved her, yet he believed, with the invincible belief of man, that she could be jealous of him. “You must not go to Canada alone. We will go there on our honeymoon!”

This proposition, sweet as it appeared to him, evidently did not raise any feeling of exhilaration in her.

“Canada is too far away for a honeymoon. You would have nothing to do there.”

“We will go to Paris.”

“Very well,” she replied.

Her calmness maddened him.

“Launa, darling, try to love me. I care for you so much; you are all the world to me. I love you—I love you!”

He took her in his arms, and it had all the appearance of a passionate, willing embrace. Paul was just going to open the window to come in. Launa did not see him—he turned round and walked away, and Mr. Wainbridge let her go.

“Don’t do that,” she said. “I hate it, loathe it, and if it were not for you and my pity—my pity, do you hear? I would . . . Sit there and talk rationally. I am a cold stone. I hate love-making, and you are going to be my husband. Have you forgotten the conversation you and I had at Victoria Mansions?”

He sat down by her, and did not answer her question. Instead, he told her all that Lord Wainbridge had said.

“Darling! my beloved! May I tell him it will be soon? Our marriage.”

“Soon?” she repeated drawing away her hand. . . . “I am so lonely, and you are no help. I wish I had someone to help me.”

“Let me.”

“You can’t; don’t you see that? Well, no matter. Will you wait until after lunch—until this evening? Then I will give you an answer.”

“My uncle is anxious to know you. He has been so good to us. We will repay him by being good to him. He needs it.”

“I know; I know.”

“Have you seen the *Times*?” asked the Member for Hackney, advancing with assurance and sitting down. The *Times*, he knew, was in the drawing-room; he had just put it down. He had also seen Paul Harvey’s face as he passed the window. Mr. Bolton had no particular feeling for Paul except that of wishing him out of the way. Harvey’s countenance looked as if he meant to go—somewhere. Such a resolution could only portend various developments with Mr. Wainbridge.

Mr. Bolton had just heard and seen in the *Times*, that he was beyond all doubt Lord Fairmouth.

Miss Cooper had hay fever for two days; no doubt this was due to the second crop of hay having just been cut. Her mother explained this at great length. Sylvia suffered intensely, and her eyes were very red. Everyone pitied her, and she stayed all day in her room; Mrs. Cooper could not stay with her for long, because hay fever is infectious.

“Poor Fairmouth is really dead,” said the Member for Hackney.

“And you are Lord Fairmouth now,” said Launa slowly.

She was thinking of something else; but it appeared to him as if her meditations were about him and his good fortune.

“Yes,” he replied.

Mr. Wainbridge left the room. The house was very quiet. He looked for Paul, but he could not find him. Paul had gone away in the canoe.

Mr. Wainbridge, therefore, was obliged to control the irresistible desire to confide in Paul, and in him only. Paul took such an interest in Launa, so did Lord Fairmouth, but Mr. Wainbridge did not fear him.

It was after dinner, during which meal Mrs. Cooper again discussed hay fever, and the depression consequent thereupon. Mr. Wainbridge was very silent. Lord Fairmouth recommended eucalyptus, and Launa looked pale, even anxious. Paul and the canoe had not returned, and it was growing dark, with a strong wind from the north-east. After dinner she was very restless and wandered about, then she began to play the piano.

Lord Fairmouth went away to write, and Mrs. Cooper retired to bed. She had old-fashioned ideas as to lovers, and regarded them as something almost indecent, requiring constant and frequent privacy.

Launa played on. The wind was shrieking, and then roaring through the tree tops. At last it gave a sudden scream and a yell. She jumped up, and her hands fell on the keys with a crash. A door banged, and a gust of wind clamoured against the window and howled outside.

“Where is Paul?”

She had been playing a Chopin study—number XI.

“Chopin is sometimes hysterical,” said Mr. Wainbridge.

“Here I am, Launa,” and Paul came in. “You were frightened. The wind is making a tremendous noise. When I opened the front door it was howling and shrieking, and nearly blew the lamps out.”

He took both her hands, and held them firmly. Her colour had come back, and she breathed quickly. There was a pause. Mr. Wainbridge strolled across the room.

“Launa, now is the time to tell Harvey your decision. When shall we be married?”

Paul let her hands go.

“When?” he asked. “Before I return to Canada? I am going soon.”

“In September,” said Mr. Wainbridge.

“Yes,” said Launa. “Paul, you have not forgotten your promise. You will give me away?”

Mr. Wainbridge gave a sigh of relieved tension. He had dreaded something different. The wind and the *étude* had affected his nerves also.

After he retired to his bed that night he remembered that Launa had said she was going to Canada. Paul had said so too. Had there been anything in this mutual resolve to go to Canada. Would he have lost her? The possibility—nay, the certainty—of this showed him his proposal for their marriage was only just in time. Her indifference was not the least of her attractions for him.

In two days Lord Wainbridge came to see her. They talked of the weather and of marriage, both of them changeable varieties, and of absorbing interest.

Lord Fairmouth went up to town, and as he went he remembered the Fisheries. Launa and he had talked very little about them. He had left the House of Commons, and she was going to be married.

CHAPTER XX

Mrs. Herbert was unhappy. She clothed herself with discrimination, and drove frequently with Sir Ralph. She had given up her reputation, and cared nothing for what people thought or said, and they said all they could say. The subject of the behaviour of a woman whose husband is away, and who is continually (they said always) with another man, is inexhaustible. Sir Ralph was kind to her. His was the kindness of stupidity, and he did not mind her being very silent.

She despised herself. It would have been brave of her to have sent him away. Sir Ralph never

kissed her, and he seldom stayed later than eleven o'clock. No one knew this, nor would they have believed it if she said so.

Lily bore the cold and indifferent greetings of her friends with an absence of notice which could only be attributed to guilt.

It was September. Mrs. Herbert was in town, with occasional days at the sea. She preferred to remain at her flat. Sir Ralph thought she stayed because town was empty, therefore a constant recognition of him and of her, when together, by their mutual friends was impossible, and they could meet in peace and in half secret.

This was not Mrs. Herbert's real reason. She was waiting for her husband. She was always expecting him, always hoping that he might come back, and very often she seemed to hear his step on the stairs, to hear the click of his latch-key, and that was all. She feared to be away for long; he would perhaps come, and not finding her waiting would imagine things. She tolerated Sir Ralph while she slightly despised him. Love always bored her; he had told her he loved her. She had replied that love was a detail. He might love her if he liked; it kept him from mischief, no doubt.

"And you?" he asked.

"Oh, me! From suicide, perhaps."

The day was fine. Mrs. Herbert put on her newest dress to drive and lunch and dine with Sir Ralph somewhere out of town.

"Have you seen the papers?" he asked, when they had shaken hands, and he had not kept the resolution, which he made every day, of kissing her. It was easy to resolve when he came up in the lift.

"I never read them in the morning. In the evening I do—advertisements and everything. Tell me the news."

"Perhaps it would be as well for you not to drive to-day. . . . It would not look well for one's future wife to be seen even while there is any uncertainty. It would look as if you had no respect for the world's arrangements. I will stay here with you. You may do as you like, but it is as well to respect etiquette."

"What are you talking about? Tell me. Who is your future wife? Is she a nun?"

Sir Ralph handed her the *Morning Post*.

"Read that."

" 'Yacht gone down of Mr. Blakeley's,' " she read. "Well? What has that to do with me? 'All hands lost, and the names of the passengers.' "

"Read them! Read them!" he said.

And she read:

"Blakeley and his wife—together—lucky souls. Mrs. Grey, I never liked her. John Colquhoun—Herbert!—Herbert! What!" she exclaimed. "Jack—it can't be—is it true? Jack. . . . God! it is cruel, cruel, and I have waited—waited, believing he would come—believing, and he was only cruising about with Mrs. Grey. Go away," she said, with sudden energy and anger. "Go now. I hate you, hate you, hate you! It is for you that he thinks I have given him up; fool—as if I would or could. Now, it is forever—why is it? Why is it? I must hurt something!" She picked up a yellow vase full of sweet peas, and threw it away from her. It crashed against the brass fender. "Jack loathed that vase, now it is broken—but the sweet peas are spilt. Help me to pick up the flowers—do help me. They look so red—they are bruised and half-dead—they seem human—they suffer. They are Jack's favourite flower. Go! go—why don't you go?"

"I cannot bear to leave you. Lily, think of me—a little—think of—"

"Leave me. Go now, and never come back."

She threw herself down on the floor, crushing her fresh dress and knocking down another vase, which broke. She lay there and could not cry—could only moan, long shuddering moans of sorrow. Alone, alone—always now, and forever, and he never would know that she had loved him—loved him! If only she had written to him!

Launa was busy with her clothes, and people were giving her teaspoons.

Paul had gone to Germany. He would return in time for her wedding. Hugh Wainbridge and Lord Wainbridge, who liked his future niece very much, had her all to themselves. Lady Wainbridge sent her volumes of sermons and books on the disappointments of the marriage state.

"I suppose it is wretched," said Launa; "but people seem to bear it fairly well after a time."

"I could," said her lover, "with you. Don't believe all you read in my aunt's books."

"Thank you," she replied gaily.

They were alone in the music-room. The piano had vases of flowers, and a strip—a beautiful deadening strip—of velvet upon it. Launa's piano had hitherto been bare.

Matrimony and music—more often matrimony and discord. She did not play very much, only little things for Lord Wainbridge; Chopin and ghosts went together.

"How do you like my dress?" she asked.

Mr. Wainbridge inspected her critically.

"It is too black," he said.

It fell in long straight folds made of some soft black material. It was becoming and yet dreary, like the robe of a sister of charity.

"It suits you; but you look like a widow."

"Death," she said; "how unlucky of you to say that! I dreamed of a coffin last night—my own—and I was getting in and out of it to see if it fitted."

"Dearest, you and I shall always be together."

"Always?" she repeated, with a little shiver, as if some ghost of the past was near, "always."

Already his mind did not answer hers. She did not want him always.

"It was a horrid dream. It frightened me."

"You will never be frightened with me. Have you heard about Herbert?"

"I have heard nothing about him."

"He was yachting with Blakeley in the Mediterranean, and the yacht went down. They were all drowned."

"All? Mr. Herbert too?"

"Yes."

"How terrible! I am so sorry for Lily, and I liked him very much. What will she do? She loves him, I am sure of that. It is terrible."

"Darling you feel for all women. But for her—she has Sir Ralph."

"Yes, but she does not love him. I must go to her. I may as well go now."

"Now? It is tea-time."

"Well, why not? With her it is probably no time, simply a long, dreary future through which she must exist. I will change my dress; ring for tea, and then you can come with me—in a hansom."

"Mrs. Herbert has said vile things about you and me. She said you were—"

"I know. But now she is in trouble, and I am sorry for her. I can forget what she has said. She was once my friend, and so I will go to her."

She dressed quickly, and they drove to Mrs. Herbert's.

Launa did not ask whether Lily would see her. She sent him away and went in alone. A bewildered maid, whose eyes were red with weeping, led the way to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Herbert lay, face downwards, on the big sofa. She had stayed on the floor until the maids lifted her on to it.

In her mind was a galloping medley of thoughts and regrets, of ungratified desires; a repetition of words she had not said, and now could never say, hurried through her brain with torturing reiteration.

Launa kneeled by her.

"I have come to you to try and comfort you."

Mrs. Herbert moaned—and then started.

"You! you! Oh Launa, I am so wretched. He is dead—dead without knowing how I love him. . . . He will never know. Is it really you, Launa? I was a brute to you; I was jealous of you. Can you forgive me? I am alone, alone. I thought he was fond of you."

"He used to talk of you," said Launa.

"Help me!" said the other. "It is all over."

For some days Launa stayed with her. Lily was more than miserable; she was crushed, and could not bear to be alone.

There was so much inaction, none of those details which have to be fulfilled when anyone dies at home, no work was to be done except the purchasing of black, no beautiful flowers to arrange, no farewell look, painful, yet a comfort, for in the last sleep the wayfarer appears at peace. There was nothing, only a dumb hideous sorrow and remorse, endless torment, weary reflection on a dreadful past, which she would have blotted out if she could, and the tears of repentance wash away nothing.

Some days had passed since the dreadful tidings.

Mrs. Herbert went exhausted to bed, and Launa left her to go home.

Hugh Wainbridge had come to fetch her, and stayed until after tea. Launa was resting when Sylvia came in.

She wandered about the room touching everything until Launa said:

"Sit down, Sylvia, unless you desire to be slain."

Sylvia obediently sat down.

She had grown morose and variable. She no longer took an interest in Mr. George and his frivolities, and she worked very hard.

Launa talked a little about Lily.

"I know," said Sylvia, "that she is miserable now, and yet I envy her. They were together for a time, he loved her and she loved him. She can remember it all. What is the use of goodness? Good women live and die without knowing love, mad real love. Men marry them, but—why didn't I do as he wanted me to do? He loved me, he asked me over and over again to belong to him absolutely, and I refused. He promised to settle all he had on me, and no one need have known. I loved him—how I do still love him! I thought I was doing right, and I believed that God would reward us—us mind—I *believed* that. I was sure that together we should be rewarded. He would never have died if I had gone, and people could have called me bad, but I would have been gloriously happy with him."

"It is awful," said Launa, "the apparent futility of all things."

"I have never lived, never had any life, nor joy, nothing except empty applause at the theatre. . . . I am so wretched, so wretched. I will go to see Mrs. Herbert and tell her I envy her. He has held her in his arms, he has kissed her, and I ache for the touch of those arms I shall never feel, I hunger for the kisses I shall never have."

"Ah, never," said Launa softly.

Sylvia continued:

"I shall be sorry to-morrow when I remember all I have said. You are lucky, you are happy, and I —She is better off; I wish I had had her chances—if I had lived with him he would never have left me. Will he ever know how I love him? Will he, Launa? Say something. Don't stare at me. Will he? Do you believe it?"

"Many waters cannot quench love, nor death, nor parting, nor marriage, nor anything."

"No," said Sylvia, "nor marriage. He was married to a devil. A reputation never brought a woman comfort. You never say to yourself 'I am respectable!' You do not feel as if respectability were a new frock in which to rejoice. Would you, Launa, have received me if I had been—what would my label be?"

"There are no men, there is no man, who is worthy of a woman giving up everything for him."

"There is love, love, love. I will go to see Mrs. Herbert to-morrow. It is so easy to call men

unworthy, but life is dreary when one tries to be good."

CHAPTER XXI

Lily Herbert had accepted her fate—one must, no matter how rebellious the heart may be. The days were long and black and endless; the nights were worse, and full of spectres. The path of life behind her shone with the brilliancy of past happiness, which is often imaginary; before her the path was dark, with the gloom of hopelessness and despair.

Sylvia's sympathy was a light to her. They frequently talked about Launa. How happy she was! How fortunate! Loved by the gods and by men. The love of men they put last; it was first in both their minds. The love of the gods is death, the love of man life. They had both wilfully thrown it away.

"Once he told me I should live with him as his sister," said Sylvia. "I hated him for it. I would have been his mistress, but not his sister. He was too good, and I was willing to risk all for him. He gave me credit for so much goodness."

"Why did you not try it?" asked Lily. "Men do not care for the brotherly pose very long. Their resolutions are momentary."

Sylvia looked at her. *Then* she had felt sure men mean what they say after they have said it, as well as while they are saying it—she had changed her mind now.

"I see," she replied, "and it is too late."

There was a pause for some moments. Each woman was thinking of those things which usually intrude only at night, and which we push into their corner and avoid contemplating as much as possible.

"Launa is an angel," said Lily. "She has been so good to me."

"She has never loved any one," said Sylvia.

"She would probably have married the other man for money, if she had," said Lily.

"Her well-regulated affection for Mr. Wainbridge is like her engagement ring. A diamond between two sapphires—neat and even. Have you ever seen my locket?"

"No. I cannot help thinking, Sylvia, he meant to come back. He sent me a present on my birthday, a little locket of pearls. He would not have sent pearls if he thought me—bad—would he? Oh, Sylvia, how lovely!"

Sylvia had unbuttoned her dress and pulled out a locket. It was an opal in the shape of a heart, surrounded by diamonds. It gleamed and glowed with an unearthly radiance. It seemed a living thing emitting sparks of fire.

"How lovely!" repeated Lily.

Sylvia hid it again.

"It knew when he was dying, and grew so dull and pale. Now it burns brighter than ever."

Then they parted. Sylvia went to the theatre, Lily sat by the fire. The day was cold and dark. She had cocoa instead of dinner, that was an ordeal she could not face alone. She sat and thought; she shut her eyes until she imagined he was there, she could almost feel his kisses, till a shuddering sob of the cold reality recalled her mind to the present. About nine o'clock her parlourmaid came in and told her Captain Carden wished to see her on important business.

"Very well," said Lily, "I will see him."

She disliked him—indifferently—and regarded a visit from him as she would one from the cabinet-maker or the plumber, so he was admitted, when to Mr. George or Sir Ralph she would have said "Not at home."

Captain Carden's face was red, he appeared excited.

"I have good news," he said. "You dislike Launa almost as much as I do?"

"No, no, Launa and I are friends. She is one of the noblest women I have ever met."

"You have changed. Would you not be glad to hear something which will give her trouble, which will be a blow to her? Women often are glad when such things happen."

"What do you mean?"

"If you are telling me the truth I will not tell you what I mean. Are you not trying to deceive me by a pretence of virtue and friendship with Launa? *You* are slightly under a cloud now, will *she* know what gloom means soon?"

"Why?"

"I shall not tell you. I am waiting until—what day is she to be married to Wainbridge? On which day are they to be joined together, and never put asunder by man? When he can kiss her, touch her, and hold her—that is what men do."

"Go away. Go at once, you have had too much to drink."

"You do not want to hear? You do not—?"

"No; go!"

Left alone, Mrs. Herbert thought it all over. Captain Carden was mad with rage and jealousy.

Reflection during the night watches made her write to him, asking him to tea, and mentioning that she had changed her mind.

Captain Carden came. He spent the afternoon with her, and left in a rage because he had not been invited to Launa's wedding on the 25th. He sent her a present—a chain supposed to possess power against the evil eye.

After this Carden visited Mrs. Herbert frequently. Launa spent the time in receiving presents, and trying on dresses, and in suffering the embraces of her future lord, who had grown more ardent and more reckless in his love-making. Paul came back from Norway, and Mr. George ordered a new

frock-coat, and admired Sylvia more fervently in black than in any colour. He went every available night to see her act, and wished for Sunday evening performances in London, for on that evening they seldom met, and he had not the satisfaction of gazing at her. Launa announced her intention of going, soon after her marriage, to Norway, where her father was buried.

Mr. Wainbridge was jealous—jealous of the dead man.

He agreed to go. He reminded himself when he promised that he was merely a lover—when the promise was to be carried out he would be a husband. There is a difference between the doings of lovers and husbands; few people—especially women—realise this beforehand.

It was the twenty-sixth of October, and very cold. Launa had been for a long walk; the suspicion of frost was quite Canadian and exhilarating while it wearied her. She was staying at Shelton.

It was barely six. She was reading. She heard a carriage drive up and wondered who it could be.

The door opened, and announced by the new butler—Launa always had maids, but with the prospect of a husband she had engaged a butler—Mrs. Herbert and Captain Carden walked in.

The former looked very handsome; her face was unusually pink; her crape bonnet and long veil thrown back suited her.

“Lily!” said Launa, “how kind of you! I am so very glad to see you. You will stay, of course.”

She avoided Captain Carden’s hand.

“How are you?” he asked. “Well, I hope?”

Launa had turned to Lily, and did not answer his inquiries.

“Where is—where are the others?” asked Lily.

“Are you alone already?” added Captain Carden.

Mr. Wainbridge came in and greeted them with a bored air.

“I have come on business,” said Captain Carden stiffly.

“And you, Lily, have come to stay,” said Launa.

“If you will have me I shall be very glad to stay.”

“I may as well tell you the object of my visit,” said Carden, with importance. “Mrs. Wainbridge, I —”

“Stop!” said Launa.

“Never mind,” said Lily, taking hold of her hand and almost crushing it. “Let him say what he has to say, and then go.”

“I did not tell you before, because I have always wanted to remind you of one day at Victoria Mansions—the day you turned me out. I loved you, and now I am quite willing to marry you, even after the disgrace of having lived for some days as this man’s mistress, for Wainbridge is married.”

A strange and awful silence settled on them. Mr. Wainbridge’s lips were parted, and trembled slightly as he made an effort to speak. Captain Carden looked supremely triumphant, and continued:

“I have proofs here. His wife lives in Edinburgh; he married her legally. You, Launa, are—what are you?”

“Not married, thank God; not married.”

Turning, she saw Paul behind her.

“Paul!” she cried, “help me!”

Paul remembered that this was the third time that she had turned to him in an uncertain situation. Was this the lucky time?

“Launa,” he said, “come away. Let me settle this for you.”

He was already her protector, and they both felt it.

“I must hear it all,” she answered.

“He has two children,” said Captain Carden. “One a son. Your child, Launa—”

“Stop,” interrupted Wainbridge. “If you insult Miss Archer again I shall kick you.”

“Miss Archer!” repeated Carden, with a laugh. “You give in very quickly—you acknowledge she has no right to your name.”

“Nor has she. We are not married.”

“Of course not,” said Captain Carden, with a laugh.

“No, not married!” said Launa.

“The 30th was to be the wedding day,” said Sylvia.

“Damn you,” shouted Carden, turning to Lily. “And you knew!”

“Yes. I have won.”

“Take the proofs. I don’t want them.” He threw down a bundle of letters and turned away. “Oh, that I had succeeded! That you, Launa, were shamed in the sight of all men and all women. When a man trusts a woman she always betrays him! Beaten by five days. Think of it—by five days.”

He rushed from the room like a whirlwind—if he had succeeded, and brought shame to a woman and guilt to a man, he would have faced them all bravely. The women followed him—Launa still stood by Paul, who held her hand. She even returned the pressure of his fingers. Mr. Wainbridge went towards her, and Paul left the room.

“Good-bye, Launa,” said Mr. Wainbridge. “Good-bye. I suppose it is all over; I suppose you could not forget.”

“Forget. Do not say what I never can forget.”

“And yet women have faced the Divorce Court for a man they love.”

“When a woman loves; but when she pities—no. I told you once—”

“I am not married to her,” he continued, with what he considered much passion. “You know I do not believe in marriage as a binding ceremony. Love only is binding. I went with her to a priest, and we signed our names. How can a priest—a mortal man—marry men and women for eternity?”

“Great Heaven!” said Launa, “and I meant to marry you. Thank God, I escaped.” Her piety would not have been so excessive had she loved him. “You would not have believed in your marriage with me?”

“No; but I had settled all I have or will have upon you by your name and on your children—I love

you, but I see it is all over. . . . Good-bye. . . . Launa, my darling, wish me well."

"I pray for that woman who is your wife, and I rejoice that I escaped. I thank Heaven—you told me lies, you wanted my pity, you—"

"Heaven had but little to do with this. Carden was the ruling spirit."

"Go!" said Launa; "go before I say all I want to."

The new butler helped him on with his overcoat—he had listened at the key-hole, and Mr. Wainbridge would be a lord some day. He was a religious man, and remembered the chief butler and Joseph, but no quotation occurred to him which would apply to the situation; besides, he was a good servant and knew his place.

Mr. Wainbridge had the satisfaction of driving away in the trap which had brought Captain Carden to Shelton—therefore Carden would have to walk to the station and miss his train—unless Launa had out her horses for him. The reflections of Mr. Wainbridge during his journey to Paddington were unpleasant. There was his uncle to face, and he must make explanations to him.

Nothing was so disquieting as Launa's cry for help to Paul. Why Paul? Why not to Sylvia or Lily or anyone? And the sound of relief in her voice—relief—was there joy? She had never loved him; if she had, she would have loved him married or dead. She was the sort of woman who does not—who cannot change. Therefore if she had loved him she could have risked all for him.

His only consolation was Carden's walk in the dark to the station, and journey by a slow train at 1 A.M. to town. Carden would swear; it stopped at every station.

CHAPTER XXII

PAUL consigned his beloved to Mrs. Herbert and went up to town. Mrs. Cooper and Sylvia were useless. The former wept over the disgrace and made speeches beginning with "if"—the latter said "everyone was unfortunate and miserable." Paul felt as if everyone were happy, beginning with himself and including Launa. Her cry to him had not been the cry of disappointment and sorrow; it had been what? He could not define it. Relief was too mild, joy too great a name.

Mr. Wainbridge found a certain amount of awkwardness in the interview with his uncle, which had to take place at once on account of the approaching marriage, which was now broken off. It was so difficult to explain what had transpired and to do it with a due regard for his own feelings.

Lord Wainbridge expressed much disappointment at his nephew's engagement being broken off. He had received an announcement thereof by telegraph.

"Why! why! why!" he exclaimed. "My temper is very much upset to-day. Your aunt is most trying."

"We have disagreed about settlements," said the nephew.

"Damn settlements. That is rubbish. What else?"

"There is," said his nephew slowly, "only one insurmountable barrier and she knows it."

"Well? Can't you do away with it?"

"I am married already."

"Married? What a fool! You mean that you have had an establishment which you will give up now, of course, and she will not forgive this. She will naturally in time. Things will come right, do not be alarmed."

"No, this will never come right for I am really married."

"Yet you love Launa, and you meant to marry her and to live with her as your wife?"

"Yes."

"To commit bigamy—in spite of the insurmountable barrier?"

"Yes," replied Wainbridge.

His uncle stared at him aghast. Admiration, blended with contempt, showed in his countenance—admiration for the audacity of the plan, contempt for its failure.

"I thought, when I did think," said the nephew, "that if we were once married, if she were only bound to me by indissoluble ties, she could not leave me, and if at any time she heard rumours, well, she would have kept quiet about it. The other woman does not know my name."

"It is dreadful," said Lord Wainbridge. "Now there is no heir and your aunt—" he sighed. "I wish you had not told me. I should have preferred your being reticent with me. It is most unfortunate. I wish I did not know it."

His was the hopeless lament of the aged.

"How old you are," thought his nephew, who was more than sorry; but he did not groan—that was of no avail.

"There is an heir," he said.

"You are a greater fool than I thought you. What will you tell your aunt?"

"Nothing—or the settlement story? which you prefer."

He regretted being found out. His god had been the fear of discovery; he worshipped it, and to it he had made many sacrifices. But it was all over.

"He is quiet, and bears it well," thought Lord Wainbridge; but then we should always bear the result of our own wrong-doing with philosophy. No one—Lord Wainbridge least of all—would have pitied him had he not endured it with patience. Inwardly Hugh Wainbridge was raging—raging with a wild longing to possess Launa—to have held her in his arms alone, while she was his—to have kissed the life and breath out of her. It was intolerable to think that it was over, that she was not his, and never would be. All through his own stupidity, which he cursed, he felt a mad wild beast, just an animal longing to kill anyone in his way, and to possess the one object of his passion. How

he wished he had not told his uncle. Lord Wainbridge was so disappointed.

Mr. Wainbridge sat and meditated on the unsatisfactoriness, the dreariness of all things. His one desire was withheld from him, the desire which now threatened to become madness. He was hardly aware of his uncle's departure—he seemed to see Launa with a smile of triumph, of victory, on her face, and he could not get to her; she eluded him. How he loved her!—loved her, would, *must* have her.

Paul wrote to Launa; then he waited and did not go down to see her, much as he longed to do so.

One afternoon he met Sylvia alone. She greeted him with joy. She looked different.

"You look wicked," he said; and she laughed.

"When are you going to Launa? Go soon. One woman may as well think she is going to be happy in this world. As for me, I have learned that there is no happiness anywhere. I have vanquished my illusions."

"How is Launa?"

"Alone down there in this dreary weather," she replied. "She sent us all away—got rid of us very cleverly, even of Mrs. Herbert, and is there by herself."

"Where are you going?" asked Paul.

"Home—I am wretched. I am so lonely and so weary of—virtue. I think it is very dull. My thoughts annoy me, and they continue so incessantly."

"Come and have some tea with me," he said.

For he was glad to be able to talk to her. He could not well rush down to Shelton at five o'clock, and he doubted the expediency of doing so.

"Launa took it quietly," said Sylvia, as she drank her tea. "After we were alone she was so different—so *glad*. I rejoice when I remember how she said, 'Paul!' Did you hear the sound in her voice when she called you?—as if she could not be relieved and grateful enough. I am thinking of marriage—serious, uncomfortable marriage myself."

"You are? I thought—"

"You thought me broken-hearted. So I am; I am wretched—tired of waiting, of longing, and of thinking what a fool I have been. He loved me, and it is too late. I long for love until I feel nearly mad, so I am going to marry. I shall be bound, tied up, and there will be no escape, and so I must feel peaceful."

"You will not."

"Ah, but I shall. Why did I not go with him? Why did I not love him while I could?"

"Who are you going to marry?"

"A man who knows it all. I am not going to deceive him. He says the heart of a woman cannot remain in a man's grave for ever. But . . . when he is with me I see . . . the other. It is ghastly."

"So I should think, and it will be worse. Don't do it, Sylvia. You will regret it always."

"No, I think you are mistaken. Let us talk of Launa."

That night Paul wrote to her. He waited with impatience for her answer.

When it came, she said she was leaving for Canada and the letter was posted at Liverpool.

CHAPTER XXIII

LAUNA'S first feeling was relief, relief—so intense, so endless, that she felt buoyant, joyful, secure. But after some days she felt shame. What had Hugh Wainbridge thought of her? What could a man think of a woman whom he could propose to wrong so terribly? And what had Paul thought of her? Why did he not come?

Why should she think he cared still? She had no reason to think so. Doubt, misery, and loneliness, became torturing demons; in action she saw the only relief possible, and then she remembered Canada, "Solitude," the woods, the shore. Paul despised her, she was sure; she would go away, go home.

The penetrating depressing autumn mist was slowly making its way over the land, it was almost rain, it was so thick, and far more wetting. The river was shrouded in a white ghostly mantle. She thought of the keen air at "Solitude," of the clear sky, and of the shore with the far-away landscape, mysterious and, always to her, enticing. And then of the storms, howling, fierce, and powerful, like the terrible force and presence of an unseen mighty power, the devastating Great Spirit of the North who, for five months of the year, reigns supreme, who is real, tangible, brutal, unlike the horrible slowness of this climate.

"Solitude" was empty, Launa cabled to the gardener's wife who inhabited a lodge, and who once had been housekeeper.

When Paul got her letter, she and her maid were out on the Atlantic, rapidly going farther away.

Launa was beginning to forget the Wainbridge incident, though at first her anger had seemed unending.

The weather became very cold as they neared Halifax. The big blue harbour, with its white-capped waves and white-covered shores, was home. The drifting bits of ice were gaily rushing on, tossed by the waves, the tide, and the wash of the big steamer. The decks and rigging were covered with ice, the sea had swept the ship, and, after sweeping it, the frost demon bound everything in his cold arms. She wondered how she had existed so long in that grey land without sun. The sky looked higher and more deeply blue.

"Solitude" was quite ready for her, huge fires blazed everywhere, old servants had come back. She drove ten miles from the nearest station, how the sleigh runners creaked, and the bells rang

clear, a big yellow moon was up before she arrived; everything was so strong, so intense, so cold.

"Solitude" was lonely. She spent the greater part of the days out of doors. She was young, and the horribleness of Mr. Wainbridge's behaviour became dimmer. She had only been angry, how would she have felt if she had loved him?

After a week of driving and snowshoeing she got out her toboggan.

The land from "Solitude" to the Bay sloped down for about half a mile, and then the Bay was frozen, the ice covered with snow, and she could toboggan straight across it. The crust of the snow was very hard. The toboggan started slowly, then went faster, faster, little bits of crisp snow flew in her face, the air whistled past her as she rushed along, the pace became swifter,—it was glorious: the sun, the air, and the clear blue sky were life-giving as she tore on. The toboggan bounded over the rough blocks of ice on the edge of the Bay which were broken by the tide. On the flat stretch of ice it began to move more slowly and then stopped. It was splendid. She spent all the afternoon at it; the thermometer was ten below zero, but it was so still and sunny that she could not feel cold.

It was snowing hard and blowing from the north-east; the view from "Solitude" was dim, whirling snow hurled by the wind, little drifting eddies of snow curled round the top of the drifts already forming quickly.

Launa started on snowshoes. The wind knocked her about and she staggered before it. She waited in the shelter of the porch until the fury of the blast seemed to have swept past, then she went on again. The snow was loose, and the walking, even on snowshoes, very heavy. She struggled to the little post-office, though there was no need for this, for they would have sent up her letters; the one she wanted was not there. She wandered on in the storm to pass the time hoping to grow very tired. The road was gone, it had disappeared in a level plain of snow, only like black specks occasional stones showed up in the walls. The snow drifted and whirled, and the wind was so keen and cold, like knives, with a stinging burning sensation. The snow made its way under her big fur collar and chilled her neck and face though she was so hot.

Suddenly she saw a dark figure coming nearer. It was a man. "Good-night," she said as they passed. She doubted if he could hear, the wind crashed by them, it roared over their heads and howled behind them.

The man turned, and with two steps towards her, said:

"Launa, darling!"

He put his arms round her, and then walked on her snowshoes, nearly knocking her over, and Launa lay in his arms; her feet were most uncomfortable, one snowshoe was on its side.

"Paul!" she gasped.

His thick blanket coat against her mouth prevented conversation.

"Come back to 'Solitude,' " he said; "it is too cold and too stormy for you to be out."

He took her hand, and they trudged on for the greater part of the way in silence; it was too windy to talk, and neither knew when the other spoke unless their heads were close together.

At "Solitude" Paul undid her snowshoes and his own, then they went into the hall, all bright with a huge fire and flowers. Paul put his arms round her and kissed her. She was covered with snow.

"I must go. Let me go, Paul; you will stay. There are things you can put on in the dressing-room; but I must get them for you. I want to tell you about him."

"I don't want to know anything. He was a beast; you are mine now. I am not wet, Launa; you have forgotten the snow is dry. Even Mrs. Grundy could not turn a man out on a dark night, with the thermometer at zero and a gale blowing."

When she came down he was waiting. He came towards her. She loved him, he loved her; was there anything in the world she needed now?

He put his arms round her.

"You have forgiven me?" he said, and he kissed her.

"Paul, you won't hate me?"

"Probably I shall. Tell me why?"

"Well, you know I do not like—much kissing."

"I have observed that with regret, or rather I hear you say it with sorrow; for since I came I have kissed you several times and you—"

"Yes," she interrupted, "but do you not think we had better be careful? It might get—common, we might grow accustomed to it, and not—like it as much."

Paul laughed.

"Oh, Launa!"

"Tell me how you got here?" she asked. They were sitting by the tea-table. "The roads are blocked, and it snowed all night as well as to-day."

"Changing the subject rapidly was always one of your accomplishments. Kissing and roads—I see the connection to you."

"Paul!"

"I started to drive," he answered. "At last we stuck in a drift near Montague's; so I came on snowshoes."

"It was a dreadful tramp."

"It was the best I ever had—with you at the end of it. I wonder if you will ever know? How soon will you marry me? I cannot stay at 'Solitude,' and fifteen miles is too far apart for you and me."

"You never came back! You never wrote to me at 'Shelton.' I thought you did not care—that you despised me, and thought me a beast."

"And you? You were going to marry someone else. I tried to stop you—"

"I believe I was going to run away the day of the wedding," she said. "Wasn't it ghastly?"

"Awful," he said briefly. "Sylvia has promised to marry the Member for Hackney. Did she write to you?"

"No. She will marry Lord Fairmouth? Ugh! how can she? Is it true?"

"You will marry me soon," he said. "And we will go—where shall we go?"

“We shall stay here until the spring, and then go up to the North,” she answered. “I am glad we are ‘born Canadian.’ Aren’t you?”

And Paul kissed her.

THE END.

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