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THE WEAVERS

By Gilbert Parker

BOOK V.

XXXV. THE FLIGHT OF THE WOUNDED XXXVI. "IS IT ALWAYS SO-IN LIFE?" XXXVII. THE FLYING SHUTTLE XXXVIII. JASPER KIMBER SPEAKS XXXIX. FAITH JOURNEYS TO LONDON

CHAPTER XXXV

THE FLIGHT OF THE WOUNDED

"And Mario can soothe with a tenor note
The souls in purgatory."

"Non ti scordar di mi!" The voice rang out with passionate stealthy sweetness, finding its way into far recesses of human feeling. Women of perfect poise and with the confident look of luxury and social fame dropped their eyes abstractedly on the opera-glasses lying in their laps, or the programmes they mechanically fingered, and recalled, they knew not why—for what had it to do with this musical narration of a tragic Italian tale!—the days when, in the first flush of their wedded life, they had set a seal of devotion and loyalty and love upon their arms, which, long ago, had gone to the limbo of lost

jewels, with the chaste, fresh desires of worshipping hearts. Young egotists, supremely happy and defiant in the pride of the fact that they loved each other, and that it mattered little what the rest of the world enjoyed, suffered, and endured—these were suddenly arrested in their buoyant and solitary flight, and stirred restlessly in their seats. Old men whose days of work were over; who no longer marshalled their legions, or moved at a nod great ships upon the waters in masterful manoeuvres; whose voices were heard no more in chambers of legislation, lashing partisan feeling to a height of cruelty or lulling a storm among rebellious followers; whose intellects no longer devised vast schemes of finance, or applied secrets of science to transform industry—these heard the enthralling cry of a soul with the darkness of eternal loss gathering upon it, and drew back within themselves; for they too had cried like this one time or another in their lives. Stricken, they had cried out, and ambition had fled away, leaving behind only the habit of living, and of work and duty.

As Hylda, in the Duchess of Snowdon's box, listened with a face which showed nothing of what she felt, and looking straight at the stage before her, the words of a poem she had learned but yesterday came to her mind, and wove themselves into the music thrilling from the voice in the stage prison:

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonised?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue
thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?"

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence? Was it then so? The long weeks which had passed since that night at Hamley, when she had told Eglington the truth about so many things, had brought no peace, no understanding, no good news from anywhere. The morning after she had spoken with heart laid bare. Eglington had essayed to have a reconciliation; but he had come as the martyr, as one injured. His egotism at such a time, joined to his attempt to make light of things, of treating what had happened as a mere "moment of exasperation," as "one of those episodes inseparable from the lives of the high-spirited," only made her heart sink and grow cold, almost as insensible as the flesh under a spray of ether. He had been neither wise nor patient. She had not slept after that bitter, terrible scene, and the morning had found her like one battered by winter seas, every nerve desperately alert to pain, yet tears swimming at her heart and ready to spring to her eyes at a touch of the real thing, the true note—and she knew so well what the true thing was! Their great moment had passed, had left her withdrawn into herself, firmly, yet without heart, performing the daily duties of life, gay before the world, the delightful hostess, the necessary and graceful figure at so many functions.

Even as Soolsby had done, who went no further than to tell Eglington his dark tale, and told no one else, withholding it from "Our Man"; as Sybil Lady Eglington had shrunk when she had been faced by her obvious duty, so Hylda hesitated, but from better reason than either. To do right in the matter was to strike her husband—it must be a blow now, since her voice had failed. To do right was to put in the ancient home and house of Eglington one whom he—with anger and without any apparent desire to have her altogether for himself, all the riches of her life and love—had dared to say commanded her sympathy and interest, not because he was a man dispossessed of his rights, but because he was a man possessed of that to which he had no right. The insult had stung her, had driven her back into a reserve, out of which she seemed unable to emerge. How could she compel Eglington to do right in this thing—do right by his own father's son?

Meanwhile, that father's son was once more imperilling his life, once more putting England's prestige in the balance in the Soudan, from which he had already been delivered twice as though by miracles. Since he had gone, months before, there had been little news; but there had been much public anxiety; and she knew only too well that there had been 'pourparlers' with foreign ministers, from which no action came safe-guarding David.

Many a human being has realised the apathy, the partial paralysis of the will, succeeding a great struggle, which has exhausted the vital forces. Many a general who has fought a desperate and victorious fight after a long campaign, and amid all the anxieties and miseries of war, has failed to follow up his advantage, from a sudden lesion of the power for action in him. He has stepped from the iron routine of daily effort into a sudden freedom, and his faculties have failed him, the iron of his will has vanished. So it was with Hylda. She waited for she knew not what. Was it some dim hope that Eglington might see the right as she saw it? That he might realise how unreal was this life they were living, outwardly peaceful and understanding, deluding the world, but inwardly a place of tears. How she dreaded the night and its recurrent tears, and the hours when she could not sleep, and waited for the joyless morning, as one lost on the moor, blanched with cold, waits for the sun-rise! Night after night at a certain hour—the hour when she went to bed at last after that poignant revelation to Eglington—she wept, as she had wept then, heart-broken tears of disappointment, disillusion, loneliness; tears for the bitter pity of it all; for the wasting and wasted opportunities; for the common

aim never understood or planned together; for the precious hours lived in an air of artificial happiness and social excitement; for a perfect understanding missed; for the touch which no longer thrilled.

But the end of it all must come. She was looking frail and delicate, and her beauty, newly refined, and with a fresh charm, as of mystery or pain, was touched by feverishness. An old impatience once hers was vanished, and Kate Heaver would have given a month's wages for one of those flashes of petulance of other days ever followed by a smile. Now the smile was all too often there, the patient smile which comes to those who have suffered. Hardness she felt at times, where Eglington was concerned, for he seemed to need her now not at all, to be self-contained, self-dependent—almost arrogantly so; but she did not show it, and she was outwardly patient.

In his heart of hearts Eglington believed that she loved him, that her interest in David was only part of her idealistic temperament—the admiration of a woman for a man of altruistic aims; but his hatred of David, of what David was, and of his irrefutable claims, reacted on her. Perverseness and his unhealthy belief that he would master her in the end, that she would one day break down and come to him, willing to take his view in all things, and to be his slave—all this drove him farther and farther on a fatal, ever-broadening path.

Success had spoiled him. He applied his gifts in politics, daringly unscrupulous, superficially persuasive, intellectually insinuating, to his wife; and she, who had been captured once by all these things, was not to be captured again. She knew what alone could capture her; and, as she sat and watched the singers on the stage now, the divine notes of that searching melody still lingering in her heart, there came a sudden wonder whether Eglington's heart could not be awakened. She knew that it never had been, that he had never known love, the transfiguring and reclaiming passion. No, no, surely it could not be too late—her marriage with him had only come too soon! He had ridden over her without mercy; he had robbed her of her rightful share of the beautiful and the good; he had never loved her; but if love came to him, if he could but once realise how much there was of what he had missed! If he did not save himself—and her—what would be the end? She felt the cords drawing her elsewhere; the lure of a voice she had heard in an Egyptian garden was in her ears. One night at Hamley, in an abandonment of grief-life hurt her so—she had remembered the prophecy she had once made that she would speak to David, and that he would hear; and she had risen from her seat, impelled by a strange new feeling, and had cried: "Speak! speak to me!" As plainly as she had ever heard anything in her life, she had heard his voice speak to her a message that sank into the innermost recesses of her being, and she had been more patient afterwards. She had no doubt whatever; she had spoken to him, and he had answered; but the answer was one which all the world might have heard.

Down deep in her nature was an inalienable loyalty, was a simple, old-fashioned feeling that "they two," she and Eglington, should cleave unto each other till death should part. He had done much to shatter that feeling; but now, as she listened to Mario's voice, centuries of predisposition worked in her, and a great pity awoke in her heart. Could she not save him, win him, wake him, cure him of the disease of Self?

The thought brought a light to her eyes which had not been there for many a day. Out of the deeps of her soul this mist of a pure selflessness rose, the spirit of that idealism which was the real chord of sympathy between her and Egypt.

Yes, she would, this once again, try to win the heart of this man; and so reach what was deeper than heart, and so also give him that without which his life must be a failure in the end, as Sybil Eglington had said. How often had those bitter anguished words of his mother rung in her ears— "So brilliant and unscrupulous, like yourself; but, oh, so sure of winning a great place in the world . . . so calculating and determined and ambitious !" They came to her now, flashed between the eager solicitous eyes of her mind and the scene of a perfect and everlasting reconciliation which it conjured up—flashed and were gone; for her will rose up and blurred them into mist; and other words of that true palimpsest of Sybil Eglington's broken life came instead: "And though he loves me little, as he loves you little too, yet he is my son, and for what he is we are both responsible one way or another." As the mother, so the wife. She said to herself now in sad paraphrase, "And though he loves me little, yet he is my husband, and for what he is it may be that I am in some sense responsible." Yet he is my husband! All that it was came to her; the closed door, the drawn blinds; the intimacy which shut them away from all the world; the things said which can only be said without desecration between two honest souls who love each other; and that sweet isolation which makes marriage a separate world, with its own sacred revelation. This she had known; this had been; and though the image of the sacred thing had been defaced, yet the shrine was not destroyed.

For she believed that each had kept the letter of the law; that, whatever his faults, he had turned his face to no other woman. If she had not made his heart captive and drawn him by an ever-shortening cord of attraction, yet she was sure that none other had any influence over him, that, as he had looked

at her in those short-lived days of his first devotion, he looked at no other. The way was clear yet. There was nothing irretrievable, nothing irrevocable, which would for ever stain the memory and tarnish the gold of life when the perfect love should be minted. Whatever faults of mind or disposition or character were his— or hers—there were no sins against the pledges they had made, nor the bond into which they had entered. Life would need no sponge. Memory might still live on without a wound or a cowl of shame.

It was all part of the music to which she listened, and she was almost oblivious of the brilliant throng, the crowded boxes, or of the Duchess of Snowdon sitting near her strangely still, now and again scanning the beautiful face beside her with a reflective look. The Duchess loved the girl—she was but a girl, after all—as she had never loved any of her sex; it had come to be the last real interest of her life. To her eyes, dimmed with much seeing, blurred by a garish kaleidoscope of fashionable life, there had come a look which was like the ghost of a look she had, how many decades ago.

Presently, as she saw Hylda's eyes withdraw from the stage, and look at her with a strange, soft moisture and a new light in them, she laid her fan confidently on her friend's knee, and said in her abrupt whimsical voice: "You like it, my darling; your eyes are as big as saucers. You look as if you'd been seeing things, not things on that silly stage, but what Verdi felt when he wrote the piece, or something of more account than that."

"Yes, I've been seeing things," Hylda answered with a smile which came from a new-born purpose, the dream of an idealist. "I've been seeing things that Verdi did not see, and of more account, too. . . . Do you suppose the House is up yet?"

A strange look flashed into the Duchess's eyes, which had been watching her with as much pity as interest. Hylda had not been near the House of Commons this session, though she had read the reports with her usual care. She had shunned the place.

"Why, did you expect Eglington?" the Duchess asked idly, yet she was watchful too, alert for every movement in this life where the footsteps of happiness were falling by the edge of a precipice, over which she would not allow herself to look. She knew that Hylda did not expect Eglington, for the decision to come to the opera was taken at the last moment.

"Of course not—he doesn't know we are here. But if it wasn't too late, I thought I'd go down and drive him home."

The Duchess veiled her look. Here was some new development in the history which had been torturing her old eyes, which had given her and Lord Windlehurst as many anxious moments as they had known in many a day, and had formed them into a vigilance committee of two, who waited for the critical hour when they should be needed.

"We'll go at once if you like," she replied. "The opera will be over soon. We sent word to Windlehurst to join us, you remember, but he won't come now; it's too late. So, we'll go, if you like."

She half rose, but the door of the box opened, and Lord Windlehurst looked in quizzically. There was a smile on his face.

"I'm late, I know; but you'll forgive me—you'll forgive me, dear lady," he added to Hylda, "for I've been listening to your husband making a smashing speech for a bad cause."

Hylda smiled. "Then I must go and congratulate him," she answered, and withdrew her hand from that of Lord Windlehurst, who seemed to hold it longer than usual, and pressed it in a fatherly way.

"I'm afraid the House is up," he rejoined, as Hylda turned for her opera-cloak; "and I saw Eglington leave Palace Yard as I came away." He gave a swift, ominous glance towards the Duchess, which Hylda caught, and she looked at each keenly.

"It's seldom I sit in the Peers' Gallery," continued Windlehurst; "I don't like going back to the old place much. It seems empty and hollow. But I wouldn't have missed Eglington's fighting speech for a good deal."

"What was it about?" asked Hylda as they left the box. She had a sudden throb of the heart. Was it the one great question, that which had been like a gulf of fire between them?

"Oh, Turkey—the unpardonable Turk," answered Windlehurst. "As good a defence of a bad case as I ever heard."

"Yes, Eglington would do that well," said the Duchess enigmatically, drawing her cloak around her and adjusting her hair. Hylda looked at her sharply, and Lord Windlehurst slyly, but the Duchess

seemed oblivious of having said anything out of the way, and added: "It's a gift seeing all that can be said for a bad cause, and saying it, and so making the other side make their case so strong that the verdict has to be just."

"Dear Duchess, it doesn't always work out that way," rejoined Windlehurst with a dry laugh. "Sometimes the devil's advocate wins."

"You are not very complimentary to my husband," retorted Hylda, looking him in the eyes, for she was not always sure when he was trying to baffle her.

"I'm not so sure of that. He hasn't won his case yet. He has only staved off the great attack. It's coming—soon."

"What is the great attack? What has the Government, or the Foreign Office, done or left undone?" "Well, my dear—" Suddenly Lord Windlehurst remembered himself, stopped, put up his eyeglass, and with great interest seemed to watch a gay group of people opposite; for the subject of attack was Egypt and the Government's conduct in not helping David, in view not alone of his present danger, but of the position of England in the country, on which depended the security of her highway to the East. Windlehurst was a good actor, and he had broken off his words as though the group he was now watching had suddenly claimed his attention. "Well, well, Duchess," he said reflectively, "I see a new nine days' wonder yonder." Then, in response to a reminder from Hylda, he continued: "Ah, yes, the attack! Oh, Persia—Persia, and our feeble diplomacy, my dear lady, though you mustn't take that as my opinion, opponent as I am. That's the charge, Persia—and her cats."

The Duchess breathed a sigh of relief; for she knew what Windlehurst had been going to say, and she shrank from seeing what she felt she would see, if Egypt and Claridge Pasha's name were mentioned. That night at Harnley had burnt a thought into her mind which she did not like. Not that she had any pity for Eglington; her thought was all for this girl she loved. No happiness lay in the land of Egypt for her, whatever her unhappiness here; and she knew that Hylda must be more unhappy still before she was ever happy again, if that might be. There was that concerning Eglington which Hylda did not know, yet which she must know one day—and then! But why were Hylda's eyes so much brighter and softer and deeper to-night? There was something expectant, hopeful, brooding in them. They belonged not to the life moving round her, but were shining in a land of their own, a land of promise. By an instinct in each of them they stood listening for a moment to the last strains of the opera. The light leaped higher in Hylda's eyes.

"Beautiful—oh, so beautiful!" she said, her hand touching the Duchess's arm.

The Duchess gave the slim warm fingers a spasmodic little squeeze. "Yes, darling, beautiful," she rejoined; and then the crowd began to pour out behind them.

Their carriages were at the door. Lord Windlehurst put Hylda in. "The House is up," he said. "You are going on somewhere?"

"No—home," she said, and smiled into his old, kind, questioning eyes. "Home!"

"Home!" he murmured significantly as he turned towards the Duchess and her carriage. "Home!" he repeated, and shook his head sadly.

"Shall I drive you to your house?" the Duchess asked.

"No, I'll go with you to your door, and walk back to my cell. Home!" he growled to the footman, with a sardonic note in the voice.

As they drove away, the Duchess turned to him abruptly. "What did you mean by your look when you said you had seen Eglington drive away from the House?"

"Well, my dear Betty, she—the fly-away—drives him home now. It has come to that."

"To her house—Windlehurst, oh, Windlehurst!"

She sank back in the cushions, and gave what was as near a sob as she had given in many a day. Windlehurst took her hand. "No, not so bad as that yet. She drove him to his club. Don't fret, my dear Betty."

Home! Hylda watched the shops, the houses, the squares, as she passed westward, her mind dwelling almost happily on the new determination to which she had come. It was not love that was moving her, not love for him, but a deeper thing. He had brutally killed love—the full life of it—those months ago;

but there was a deep thing working in her which was as near nobility as the human mind can feel. Not in a long time had she neared her home with such expectation and longing. Often on the doorstep she had shut her eyes to the light and warmth and elegance of it, because of that which she did not see. Now, with a thrill of pleasure, she saw its doors open. It was possible Eglington might have come home already. Lord Windlehurst had said that he had left the House. She did not ask if he was in—it had not been her custom for a long time—and servants were curious people; but she looked at the hall-table. Yes, there was a hat which had evidently just been placed there, and gloves, and a stick. He was at home, then.

She hurried to her room, dropped her opera-cloak on a chair, looked at herself in the glass, a little fluttered and critical, and then crossed the hallway to Eglington's bedroom. She listened for a moment. There was no sound. She turned the handle of the door softly, and opened it. A light was burning low, but the room was empty. It was as she thought, he was in his study, where he spent hours sometimes after he came home, reading official papers. She went up the stairs, at first swiftly, then more slowly, then with almost lagging feet. Why did she hesitate? Why should a woman falter in going to her husband—to her own one man of all the world? Was it not, should it not be, ever the open door between them? Confidence—confidence—could she not have it, could she not get it now at last? She had paused; but now she moved on with quicker step, purpose in her face, her eyes softly lighted.

Suddenly she saw on the floor an opened letter. She picked it up, and, as she did so, involuntarily observed the writing. Almost mechanically she glanced at the contents. Her heart stood still. The first words scorched her eyes.

"Eglington—Harry, dearest," it said, "you shall not go to sleep to-night without a word from me. This will make you think of me when . . . "

Frozen, struck as by a mortal blow, Hylda looked at the signature. She knew it—the cleverest, the most beautiful adventuress which the aristocracy and society had produced. She trembled from head to foot, and for a moment it seemed that she must fall. But she steadied herself and walked firmly to Eglington's door. Turning the handle softly, she stepped inside.

He did not hear her. He was leaning over a box of papers, and they rustled loudly under his hand. He was humming to himself that song she heard an hour ago in *Il Trovatore*, that song of passion and love and tragedy. It sent a wave of fresh feeling over her. She could not go on—could not face him, and say what she must say. She turned and passed swiftly from the room, leaving the door open, and hurried down the staircase. Eglington heard now, and wheeled round. He saw the open door, listened to the rustle of her skirts, knew that she had been there. He smiled, and said to himself:

"She came to me, as I said she would. I shall master her—the full surrender, and then—life will be easy then."

Hylda hurried down the staircase to her room, saw Kate Heaver waiting, beckoned to her, caught up her opera-cloak, and together they passed down the staircase to the front door. Heaver rang a bell, a footman appeared, and, at a word, called a cab. A minute later they were ready:

"Snowdon House," Hylda said; and they passed into the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"IS IT ALWAYS SO—IN LIFE?"

The Duchess and her brother, an ex-diplomatist, now deaf and patiently amiable and garrulous, had met on the doorstep of Snowdon House, and together they insisted on Lord Windlehurst coming in for a talk. The two men had not met for a long time, and the retired official had been one of Lord Windlehurst's own best appointments in other days. The Duchess had the carriage wait in consequence.

The ex-official could hear little, but he had cultivated the habit of talking constantly and well. There were some voices, however, which he could hear more distinctly than others, and Lord Windlehurst's was one of them—clear, well-modulated, and penetrating. Sipping brandy and water, Lord Windlehurst gave his latest quip. They were all laughing heartily, when the butler entered the room and said, "Lady Eglington is here, and wishes to see your Grace."

As the butler left the room, the Duchess turned despairingly to Windlehurst, who had risen, and was paler than the Duchess. "It has come," she said, "oh, it has come! I can't face it."

"But it doesn't matter about you facing it," Lord Windlehurst rejoined. "Go to her and help her, Betty. You know what to do—the one thing." He took her hand and pressed it.

She dashed the tears from her eyes and drew herself together, while her brother watched her benevolently.

He had not heard what was said. Betty had always been impulsive, he thought to himself, and here was some one in trouble—they all came to her, and kept her poor.

"Go to bed, Dick," the Duchess said to him, and hurried from the room. She did not hesitate now. Windlehurst had put the matter in the right way. Her pain was nothing, mere moral cowardice; but Hylda—!

She entered the other room as quickly as rheumatic limbs would permit. Hylda stood waiting, erect, her eyes gazing blankly before her and rimmed by dark circles, her face haggard and despairing.

Before the Duchess could reach her, she said in a hoarse whisper: "I have left him—I have left him. I have come to you."

With a cry of pity the Duchess would have taken the stricken girl in her arms, but Hylda held out a shaking hand with the letter in it which had brought this new woe and this crisis foreseen by Lord Windlehurst. "There—there it is. He goes from me to her—to that!" She thrust the letter into the Duchess's fingers. "You knew—you knew! I saw the look that passed between you and Windlehurst at the opera. I understand all now. He left the House of Commons with her—and you knew, oh, you knew! All the world knows—every one knew but me." She threw up her hands. "But I've left him—I've left him, for ever."

Now the Duchess had her in her arms, and almost forcibly drew her to a sofa. "Darling, my darling," she said, "you must not give way. It is not so bad as you think. You must let me help to make you understand."

Hylda laughed hysterically. "Not so bad as I think! Read—read it," she said, taking the letter from the Duchess's fingers and holding it before her face. "I found it on the staircase. I could not help but read it." She sat and clasped and unclasped her hands in utter misery. "Oh, the shame of it, the bitter shame of it! Have I not been a good wife to him? Have I not had reason to break my heart? But I waited, and I wanted to be good and to do right. And to-night I was going to try once more—I felt it in the opera. I was going to make one last effort for his sake. It was for his sake I meant to make it, for I thought him only hard and selfish, and that he had never loved; and if he only loved, I thought—"

She broke off, wringing her hands and staring into space, the ghost of the beautiful figure that had left the Opera House with shining eyes.

The Duchess caught the cold hands. "Yes, yes, darling, I know. I understand. So does Windlehurst. He loves you as much as I do. We know there isn't much to be got out of life; but we always hoped you would get more than anybody else."

Hylda shrank, then raised her head, and looked at the Duchess with an infinite pathos. "Oh, is it always so—in life? Is no one true? Is every one betrayed sometime? I would die—yes, a thousand times yes, I would rather die than bear this. What do I care for life—it has cheated me! I meant well, and I tried to do well, and I was true to him in word and deed even when I suffered most, even when—"

The Duchess laid a cheek against the burning head. "I understand, my own dear. I understand—altogether."

"But you cannot know," the broken girl replied; "but through everything I was true; and I have been tempted too when my heart was aching so, when the days were so empty, the nights so long, and my heart hurt—hurt me. But now, it is over, everything is done. You will keep me here—ah, say you will keep me here till everything can be settled, and I can go away—far away—far—!"

She stopped with a gasping cry, and her eyes suddenly strained into the distance, as though a vision of some mysterious thing hung before her. The Duchess realised that that temptation, which has come to so many disillusioned mortals, to end it all, to find quiet somehow, somewhere out in the dark, was upon her. She became resourceful and persuasively commanding.

"But no, my darling," she said, "you are going nowhere. Here in London is your place now. And you

must not stay here in my house. You must go back to your home. Your place is there. For the present, at any rate, there must be no scandal. Suspicion is nothing, talk is nothing, and the world forgets—"

"Oh, I do not care for the world or its forgetting!" the wounded girl replied. "What is the world to me! I wanted my own world, the world of my four walls, quiet and happy, and free from scandal and shame. I wanted love and peace there, and now . . . !"

"You must be guided by those who love you. You are too young to decide what is best for yourself. You must let Windlehurst and me think for you; and, oh, my darling, you cannot know how much I care for your best good!"

"I cannot, will not, bear the humiliation and the shame. This letter here—you see!"

"It is the letter of a woman who has had more affairs than any man in London. She is preternaturally clever, my dear—Windlehurst would tell you so. The brilliant and unscrupulous, the beautiful and the bad, have a great advantage in this world. Eglington was curious, that is all. It is in the breed of the Eglingtons to go exploring, to experiment."

Hylde started. Words from the letter Sybil Lady Eglington had left behind her rushed into her mind: "Experiment, subterfuge, secrecy. 'Reaping where you had not sowed, and gathering where you had not strawed.' Always experiment, experiment, experiment!"

"I have only been married three years," she moaned. "Yes, yes, my darling; but much may happen after three days of married life, and love may come after twenty years. The human heart is a strange thing."

"I was patient—I gave him every chance. He has been false and shameless. I will not go on."

The Duchess pressed both hands hard, and made a last effort, looking into the deep troubled eyes with her own grown almost beautiful with feeling—the faded world-worn eyes.

"You will go back to-night-at once," she said firmly. "To-morrow you will stay in bed till noon-at any rate, till I come. I promise you that you shall not be treated with further indignity. Your friends will stand by you, the world will be with you, if you do nothing rash, nothing that forces it to babble and scold. But you must play its game, my dearest. I'll swear that the worst has not happened. She drove him to his club, and, after a man has had a triumph, a woman will not drive him to his club if—my darling, you must trust me! If there must be the great smash, let it be done in a way that will prevent you being smashed also in the world's eyes. You can live, and you will live. Is there nothing for you to do? Is there no one for whom you would do something, who would be heart-broken if you—if you went mad now?"

Suddenly a great change passed over Hylde. "Is there no one for whom you would do something?" Just as in the desert a question like this had lifted a man out of a terrible and destroying apathy, so this searching appeal roused in Hylde a memory and a pledge. "Is there no one for whom you would do something?" Was life, then, all over? Was her own great grief all? Was her bitter shame the end?

She got to her feet tremblingly. "I will go back," she said slowly and softly.

"Windlehurst will take you home," the Duchess rejoined eagerly. "My carriage is at the door."

A moment afterwards Lord Windlehurst took Hylde's hands in his and held them long. His old, querulous eyes were like lamps of safety; his smile had now none of that cynicism with which he had aroused and chastened the world. The pitiful understanding of life was there and a consummate gentleness. He gave her his arm, and they stepped out into the moonlit night. "So peaceful, so bright!" he said, looking round.

"I will come at noon to-morrow," called the Duchess from the doorway.

A light was still shining in Eglington's study when the carriage drove up. With a latch-key Hylde admitted herself and her maid.

The storm had broken, the flood had come. The storm was over, but the flood swept far and wide.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Hour after hour of sleeplessness. The silver-tongued clock remorselessly tinkled the quarters, and Hylde lay and waited for them with a hopeless strained attention. In vain she tried devices to produce that monotony of thought which sometimes brings sleep. Again and again, as she felt that sleep was coming at last, the thought of the letter she had found flashed through her mind with words of fire, and it seemed as if there had been poured through every vein a subtle irritant. Just such a surging, thrilling flood she had felt in the surgeon's chair when she was a girl and an anesthetic had been given. But this wave of sensation led to no oblivion, no last soothing intoxication. Its current beat against her heart until she could have cried out from the mere physical pain, the clamping grip of her trouble. She withered and grew cold under the torture of it all—the ruthless spoliation of everything which made life worth while or the past endurable.

About an hour after she had gone to bed she heard Eglington's step. It paused at her door. She trembled with apprehension lest he should enter. It was many a day since he had done so, but also she had not heard his step pause at her door for many a day. She could not bear to face it all now; she must have time to think, to plan her course—the last course of all. For she knew that the next step must be the last step in her old life, and towards a new life, whatever that might be. A great sigh of relief broke from her as she heard his door open and shut, and silence fell on everything, that palpable silence which seems to press upon the night-watcher with merciless, smothering weight.

How terribly active her brain was! Pictures—it was all vivid pictures, that awful visualisation of sorrow which, if it continues, breaks the heart or wrests the mind from its sanity. If only she did not see! But she did see Eglington and the Woman together, saw him look into her eyes, take her hands, put his arm round her, draw her face to his! Her heart seemed as if it must burst, her lips cried out. With a great effort of the will she tried to hide from these agonies of the imagination, and again she would approach those happy confines of sleep, which are the only refuge to the lacerated heart; and then the weapon of time on the mantelpiece would clash on the shield of the past, and she was wide awake again. At last, in desperation, she got out of bed, hurried to the fireplace, caught the little sharp-tongued recorder in a nervous grasp, and stopped it.

As she was about to get into bed again, she saw a pile of letters lying on the table near her pillow. In her agitation she had not noticed them, and the devoted Heaven had not drawn her attention to them. Now, however, with a strange premonition, she quickly glanced at the envelopes. The last one of all was less aristocratic-looking than the others; the paper of the envelope was of the poorest, and it had a foreign look. She caught it up with an exclamation. The handwriting was that of her cousin Lacey.

She got into bed with a mind suddenly swept into a new atmosphere, and opened the flimsy cover. Shutting her eyes, she lay still for a moment—still and vague; she was only conscious of one thing, that a curtain had dropped on the terrible pictures she had seen, and that her mind was in a comforting quiet. Presently she roused herself, and turned the letter over in her hand. It was not long—was that because its news was bad news? The first chronicles of disaster were usually brief! She smoothed the paper out—it had been crumpled and was a little soiled—and read it swiftly. It ran:

DEAR LADY COUSIN—As the poet says, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and in Egypt the sparks set the stacks on fire oftener than anywhere else, I guess. She outclasses Mexico as a "precious example" in this respect. You needn't go looking for trouble in Mexico; it's waiting for you kindly. If it doesn't find you to-day, well, manana. But here it comes running like a native to his cooking-pot at sunset in Ramadan. Well, there have been "hard trials" for the Saadat. His cotton-mills were set on fire—can't you guess who did it? And now, down in Cairo, Nahoum runs Egypt; for a messenger that got through the tribes worrying us tells us that Kaid is sick, and Nahoum the Armenian says, you shall, and you shan't, now. Which is another way of saying, that between us and the front door of our happy homes there are rattlesnakes that can sting—Nahoum's arm is long, and his traitors are crawling under the canvas of our tents!

I'm not complaining for myself. I asked for what I've got, and, dear Lady Cousin, I put up some cash for it, too, as a man should. No, I don't mind for myself, fond as I am of loafing, sort of pottering round where the streets are in the hands of a pure police; for I've seen more, done more, thought more, up here, than in all my life before; and I've felt a country heaving under the touch of one of God's men—it gives you minutes that lift you out of the dust and away from the crawlers. And I'd do it all over a thousand times for him, and for what I've got out of it. I've lived. But, to speak right out plain, I don't know how long this machine will run. There's been a plant of the worst kind. Tribes we left friendly under a year ago are out against us; cities that were faithful have gone under to rebels. Nahoum has sowed the land with the tale that the Saadat means to abolish slavery, to take away the

powers of the great sheikhs, and to hand the country over to the Turk. Ebn Ezra Bey has proofs of the whole thing, and now at last the Saadat knows too late that his work has been spoiled by the only man who could spoil it. The Saadat knows it, but does he rave and tear his hair? He says nothing. He stands up like a rock before the riot of treachery and bad luck and all the terrible burden he has to carry here. If he wasn't a Quaker I'd say he had the pride of an archangel. You can bend him, but you can't break him; and it takes a lot to bend him. Men desert, but he says others will come to take their place. And so they do. It's wonderful, in spite of the holy war that's being preached, and all the lies about him sprinkled over this part of Africa, how they all fear him, and find it hard to be out on the war-path against him. We should be gorging the vultures if he wasn't the wonder he is. We need boats. Does he sit down and wring his hands? No, he organises, and builds them—out of scraps. Hasn't he enough food for a long siege? He goes himself to the tribes that have stored food in their cities, and haven't yet declared against him, and he puts a hand on their hard hearts, and takes the sulkiness out of their eyes, and a fleet of ghiassas comes down to us loaded with dourha. The defences of this place are nothing. Does he fold his hands like a man of peace that he is, and say, 'Thy will be done'? Not the Saadat. He gets two soldier-engineers, one an Italian who murdered his wife in Italy twenty years ago, and one a British officer that cheated at cards and had to go, and we've got defences that'll take some negotiating. That's the kind of man he is; smiling to cheer others when their hearts are in their boots, stern like a commander-in-chief when he's got to punish, and then he does it like steel; but I've seen him afterwards in his tent with a face that looks sixty, and he's got to travel a while yet before he's forty. None of us dares be as afraid as we could be, because a look at him would make us so ashamed we'd have to commit suicide. He hopes when no one else would ever hope. The other day I went to his tent to wait for him, and I saw his Bible open on the table. A passage was marked. It was this:

"Behold, I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: "But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

I'd like to see Nahoum with that cup of trembling in his hand, and I've got an idea, too, that it will be there yet. I don't know how it is, but I never can believe the worst will happen to the Saadat. Reading those verses put hope into me. That's why I'm writing to you, on the chance of this getting through by a native who is stealing down the river with a letter from the Saadat to Nahoum, and one to Kaid, and one to the Foreign Minister in London, and one to your husband. If they reach the hands they're meant for, it may be we shall pan out here yet. But there must be display of power; an army must be sent, without delay, to show the traitors that the game is up. Five thousand men from Cairo under a good general would do it. Will Nahoum send them? Does Kaid, the sick man, know? I'm not banking on Kaid. I think he's on his last legs. Unless pressure is put on him, unless some one takes him by the throat and says: If you don't relieve Claridge Pasha and the people with him, you will go to the crocodiles, Nahoum won't stir. So, I am writing to you. England can do it. The lord, your husband, can do it. England will have a nasty stain on her flag if she sees this man go down without a hand lifted to save him. He is worth another Alma to her prestige. She can't afford to see him slaughtered here, where he's fighting the fight of civilisation. You see right through this thing, I know, and I don't need to palaver any more about it. It doesn't matter about me. I've had a lot for my money, and I'm no use—or I wouldn't be, if anything happened to the Saadat. No one would drop a knife and fork at the breakfast-table when my obit was read out—well, yes, there's one, cute as she can be, but she's lost two husbands already, and you can't be hurt so bad twice in the same place. But the Saadat, back him, Hylda—I'll call you that at this distance. Make Nahoum move. Send four or five thousand men before the day comes when famine does its work and they draw the bowstring tight.

Salaam and salaam, and the post is going out, and there's nothing in the morning paper; and, as Aunt Melissa used to say: "Well, so much for so much!" One thing I forgot. I'm lucky to be writing to you at all. If the Saadat was an old-fashioned overlord, I shouldn't be here. I got into a bad corner three days ago with a dozen Arabs— I'd been doing a little work with a friendly tribe all on my own, and I almost got caught by this loose lot of fanatics. I shot three, and galloped for it. I knew the way through the mines outside, and just escaped by the skin of my teeth. Did the Saadat, as a matter of discipline, have me shot for cowardice? Cousin Hylda, my heart was in my mouth as I heard them yelling behind me— and I never enjoyed a dinner so much in my life. Would the Saadat have run from them? Say, he'd have stayed and saved his life too. Well, give my love to the girls!

Your affectionate cousin,

Tom LACEY.

P.S.—There's no use writing to me. The letter service is bad. Send a few thousand men by military parcel-post, prepaid, with some red seals—majors and colonels from Aldershot will do. They'll give the step to the Gypies. T.

Hylda closed her eyes. A fever had passed from her veins. Here lay her duty before her—the redemption of the pledge she had made. Whatever her own sorrow, there was work before her; a supreme effort must be made for another. Even now it might be too late. She must have strength for what she meant to do. She put the room in darkness, and resolutely banished thought from her mind.

The sun had been up for hours before she waked. Eglington had gone to the Foreign Office. The morning papers were full of sensational reports concerning Claridge Pasha and the Soudan. A Times leader sternly admonished the Government.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

JASPER KIMBER SPEAKS

That day the adjournment of the House of Commons was moved "To call attention to an urgent matter of public importance"—the position of Claridge Pasha in the Soudan. Flushed with the success of last night's performance, stung by the attacks of the Opposition morning papers, confident in the big majority behind, which had cheered him a few hours before, viciously resenting the letter he had received from David that morning, Eglington returned such replies to the questions put to him that a fire of angry mutterings came from the forces against him. He might have softened the growing resentment by a change of manner, but his intellectual arrogance had control of him for the moment; and he said to himself that he had mastered the House before, and he would do so now. Apart from his deadly antipathy to his half-brother, and the gain to himself—to his credit, the latter weighed with him not so much, so set was he on a stubborn course—if David disappeared for ever, there was at bottom a spirit of anti-expansion, of reaction against England's world-wide responsibilities. He had no largeness of heart or view concerning humanity. He had no inherent greatness, no breadth of policy. With less responsibility taken, there would be less trouble, national and international—that was his point of view; that had been his view long ago at the meeting at Heddington; and his weak chief had taken it, knowing nothing of the personal elements behind.

The disconcerting factor in the present bitter questioning in the House was, that it originated on his own side. It was Jasper Kimber who had launched the questions, who moved the motion for adjournment. Jasper had had a letter from Kate Heaven that morning early, which sent him to her, and he had gone to the House to do what he thought to be his duty. He did it boldly, to the joy of the Opposition, and with a somewhat sullen support from many on his own side. Now appeared Jasper's own inner disdain of the man who had turned his coat for office. It gave a lead to a latent feeling among members of the ministerial party, of distrust, and of suspicion that they were the dupes of a mind of abnormal cleverness which, at bottom, despised them.

With flashing eyes and set lips, vigilant and resourceful, Eglington listened to Jasper Kimber's opening remarks.

By unremitting industry Jasper had made a place for himself in the House. The humour and vitality of his speeches, and his convincing advocacy of the cause of the "factory folk," had gained him a hearing. Thickset, under middle size, with an arm like a giant and a throat like a bull, he had strong common sense, and he gave the impression that he would wear his heart out for a good friend or a great cause, but that if he chose to be an enemy he would be narrow, unrelenting, and persistent. For some time the House had been aware that he had more than a gift for criticism of the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

His speech began almost stumbingly, his h's ran loose, and his grammar became involved, but it was seen that he meant business, that he had that to say which would give anxiety to the Government, that he had a case wherein were the elements of popular interest and appeal, and that he was thinking and speaking as thousands outside the House would think and speak.

He had waited for this hour. Indirectly he owed to Claridge Pasha all that he had become. The day in which David knocked him down saw the depths of his degradation reached, and, when he got up, it was to start on a new life uncertainly, vaguely at first, but a new life for all that. He knew, from a true source, of Eglington's personal hatred of Claridge Pasha, though he did not guess their relationship; and all his interest was enlisted for the man who had, as he knew, urged Kate Heaven to marry himself—and Kate was his great ambition now. Above and beyond these personal considerations was a real sense of England's duty to the man who was weaving the destiny of a new land.

"It isn't England's business?" he retorted, in answer to an interjection from a faithful soul behind the ministerial Front Bench. "Well, it wasn't the business of the Good Samaritan to help the man that had been robbed and left for dead by the wayside; but he did it. As to David Claridge's work, some have said that—I've no doubt it's been said in the Cabinet, and it is the thing the Under-Secretary would say as naturally as he would flick a fly from his boots—that it's a generation too soon. Who knows that? I suppose there was those that thought John the Baptist was baptising too soon, that Luther preached too soon, and Savonarola was in too great a hurry, all because he met his death and his enemies triumphed—and Galileo and Hampden and Cromwell and John Howard were all too soon. Who's to be judge of that? God Almighty puts it into some men's minds to work for a thing that's a great, and maybe an impossible, thing, so far as the success of the moment is concerned. Well, for a thing that has got to be done some time, the seed has to be sown, and it's always sown by men like Claridge Pasha, who has shown millions of people—barbarians and half-civilised alike—what a true lover of the world can do. God knows, I think he might have stayed and found a cause in England, but he elected to go to the ravaging Soudan, and he is England there, the best of it. And I know Claridge Pasha—from his youth up I have seen him, and I stand here to bear witness of what the working men of England will say to-morrow. Right well the noble lord yonder knows that what I say is true. He has known it for years. Claridge Pasha would never have been in his present position, if the noble lord had not listened to the enemies of Claridge Pasha and of this country, in preference to those who know and hold the truth as I tell it here to-day. I don't know whether the noble lord has repented or not; but I do say that his Government will rue it, if his answer is not the one word 'Intervention!' Mistaken, rash or not, dreamer if you like, Claridge Pasha should be relieved now, and his policy discussed afterwards. I don't envy the man who holds a contrary opinion; he'll be ashamed of it some day. But"—he pointed towards Eglington—"but there sits the minister in whose hands his fate has been. Let us hope that this speech of mine needn't have been made, and that I've done injustice to his patriotism and to the policy he will announce."

"A set-back, a sharp set-back," said Lord Windlehurst, in the Peers' Gallery, as the cheers of the Opposition and of a good number of ministerialists sounded through the Chamber. There were those on the Treasury Bench who saw danger ahead. There was an attempt at a conference, but Kimber's seconder only said a half-dozen words, and sat down, and Eglington had to rise before any definite confidences could be exchanged. One word only he heard behind him as he got up. It was the word, "Temporise," and it came from the Prime Minister.

Eglington was in no mood for temporising. Attack only nerved him. He was a good and ruthless fighter; and last night's intoxication of success was still in his brain. He did not temporise. He did not leave a way of retreat open for the Prime Minister, who would probably wind up the debate. He fought with skill, but he fought without gloves, and the House needed gentle handling. He had the gift of effective speech to a rare degree, and when he liked he could be insinuating and witty, but he had not genuine humour or good feeling, and the House knew it. In debate he was biting, resourceful, and unscrupulous. He made the fatal mistake of thinking that intellect and gifts of fence, followed by a brilliant peroration, in which he treated the commonplaces of experienced minds as though they were new discoveries and he was their Columbus, could accomplish anything. He had never had a political crisis, but one had come now.

In his reply he first resorted to arguments of high politics, historical, informative, and, in a sense, commanding; indeed, the House became restless under what seemed a piece of intellectual dragooning. Signs of impatience appeared on his own side, and, when he ventured on a solemn warning about hampering ministers who alone knew the difficulties of diplomacy and the danger of wounding the susceptibilities of foreign and friendly countries, the silence was broken by a voice that said sneeringly, "The kid-glove Government!"

Then he began to lose place with the Chamber. He was conscious of it, and shifted his ground, pointing out the dangers of doing what the other nations interested in Egypt were not prepared to do.

"Have you asked them? Have you pressed them?" was shouted across the House. Eglington ignored the interjections. "Answer! Answer!" was called out angrily, but he shrugged a shoulder and continued his argument. If a man insisted on using a flying-machine before the principle was fully mastered and applied—if it could be mastered and applied—it must not be surprising if he was killed. Amateurs

sometimes took preposterous risks without the advice of the experts. If Claridge Pasha had asked the advice of the English Government, or of any of the Chancellories of Europe, as to his incursions into the Soudan and his premature attempts at reform, he would have received expert advice that civilisation had not advanced to that stage in this portion of the world which would warrant his experiments. It was all very well for one man to run vast risks and attempt quixotic enterprises, but neither he nor his countrymen had any right to expect Europe to embroil itself on his particular account.

At this point he was met by angry cries of dissent, which did not come from the Opposition alone. His lips set, he would not yield. The Government could not hold itself responsible for Claridge Pasha's relief, nor in any sense for his present position. However, from motives of humanity, it would make representations in the hope that the Egyptian Government would act; but it was not improbable, in view of past experiences of Claridge Pasha, that he would extricate himself from his present position, perhaps had done so already. Sympathy and sentiment were natural and proper manifestations of human society, but governments were, of necessity, ruled by sterner considerations. The House must realise that the Government could not act as though it were wholly a free agent, or as if its every move would not be matched by another move on the part of another Power or Powers.

Then followed a brilliant and effective appeal to his own party to trust the Government, to credit it with feeling and with a due regard for English prestige and the honour brought to it by Claridge Pasha's personal qualities, whatever might be thought of his crusading enterprises. The party must not fall into the trap of playing the game of the Opposition. Then, with some supercilious praise of the "worthy sentiments" of Jasper Kimber's speech and a curt depreciation of its reasoning, he declared that: "No Government can be ruled by clamour. The path to be trodden by this Government will be lighted by principles of progress and civilisation, humanity and peace, the urbane power of reason, and the persuasive influence of just consideration for the rights of others, rather than the thunder and the threat of the cannon and the sword!"

He sat down amid the cheers of a large portion of his party, for the end of his speech had been full of effective if meretricious appeal. But the debate that followed showed that the speech had been a failure. He had not uttered one warm or human word concerning Claridge Pasha, and it was felt and said, that no pledge had been given to insure the relief of the man who had caught the imagination of England.

The debate was fierce and prolonged. Eglington would not agree to any modification of his speech, to any temporising. Arrogant and insistent, he had his way, and, on a division, the Government was saved by a mere handful of votes—votes to save the party, not to indorse Eglington's speech or policy.

Exasperated and with jaw set, but with a defiant smile, Eglington drove straight home after the House rose. He found Hylde in the library with an evening paper in her hands. She had read and reread his speech, and had steeled herself for "the inevitable hour," to this talk which would decide for ever their fate and future.

Eglington entered the room smiling. He remembered the incident of the night before, when she came to his study and then hurriedly retreated. He had been defiant and proudly disdainful at the House and on the way home; but in his heart of hearts he was conscious of having failed to have his own way; and, like such men, he wanted assurance that he could not err, and he wanted sympathy. Almost any one could have given it to him, and he had a temptation to seek that society which was his the evening before; but he remembered that she was occupied where he could not reach her, and here was Hylde, from whom he had been estranged, but who must surely have seen by now that at Hamley she had been unreasonable, and that she must trust his judgment. So absorbed was he with self and the failure of his speech, that, for a moment, he forgot the subject of it, and what that subject meant to them both.

"What do you think of my speech, Hylde?" he asked, as he threw himself into a chair. "I see you have been reading it. Is it a full report?"

She handed the paper over. "Quite full," she answered evenly.

He glanced down the columns. "Sentimentalists!" he said as his eye caught an interjection. "Cant!" he added. Then he looked at Hylde, and remembered once again on whom and what his speech had been made. He saw that her face was very pale.

"What do you think of my speech?" he repeated stubbornly.

"If you think an answer necessary, I regard it as wicked and unpatriotic," she answered firmly.

"Yes, I suppose you would," he rejoined bitinglly. She got to her feet slowly, a flush passing over her face. "If you think I would, did you not think that a great many other people would think so too, and for the same reason?" she asked, still evenly, but very slowly. "Not for the same reason," he rejoined in a

low, savage voice.

"You do not treat me well," she said, with a voice that betrayed no hurt, no indignation. It seemed to state a fact deliberately; that was all.

"No, please," she added quickly, as she saw him rise to his feet with anger trembling at his lips. "Do not say what is on your tongue to say. Let us speak quietly to-night. It is better; and I am tired of strife, spoken and unspoken. I have got beyond that. But I want to speak of what you did to-day in Parliament."

"Well, you have said it was wicked and unpatriotic," he rejoined, sitting down again and lighting a cigar, in an attempt to be composed.

"What you said was that; but I am concerned with what you did. Did your speech mean that you would not press the Egyptian Government to relieve Claridge Pasha at once?"

"Is that the conclusion you draw from my words?" he asked.

"Yes; but I wish to know beyond doubt if that is what you mean the country to believe?"

"It is what I mean you to believe, my dear."

She shrank from the last two words, but still went on quietly, though her eyes burned and she shivered. "If you mean that you will do nothing, it will ruin you and your Government," she answered. "Kimber was right, and—"

"Kimber was inspired from here," he interjected sharply.

She put her hand upon herself. "Do you think I would intrigue against you? Do you think I would stoop to intrigue?" she asked, a hand clasping and unclasping a bracelet on her wrist, her eyes averted, for very shame that he should think the thought he had uttered.

"It came from this house—the influence," he rejoined.

"I cannot say. It is possible," she answered; "but you cannot think that I connive with my maid against you. I think Kimber has reasons of his own for acting as he did to-day. He speaks for many besides himself; and he spoke patriotically this afternoon. He did his duty."

"And I did not? Do you think I act alone?"

"You did not do your duty, and I think that you are not alone responsible. That is why I hope the Government will be influenced by public feeling." She came a step nearer to him. "I ask you to relieve Claridge Pasha at any cost. He is your father's son. If you do not, when all the truth is known, you will find no shelter from the storm that will break over you."

"You will tell—the truth?"

"I do not know yet what I shall do," she answered. "It will depend on you; but it is your duty to tell the truth, not mine. That does not concern me; but to save Claridge Pasha does concern me."

"So I have known."

Her heart panted for a moment with a wild indignation; but she quieted herself, and answered almost calmly: "If you refuse to do that which is honourable—and human, then I shall try to do it for you while yet I bear your name. If you will not care for your family honour, then I shall try to do so. If you will not do your duty, then I will try to do it for you." She looked him determinedly in the eyes. "Through you I have lost nearly all I cared to keep in the world. I should like to feel that in this one thing you acted honourably."

He sprang to his feet, bursting with anger, in spite of the inward admonition that much that he prized was in danger, that any breach with Hylda would be disastrous. But self-will and his native arrogance overruled the monitor within, and he said: "Don't preach to me, don't play the martyr. You will do this and you will do that! You will save my honour and the family name! You will relieve Claridge Pasha, you will do what Governments choose not to do; you will do what your husband chooses not to do—Well, I say that you will do what your husband chooses to do, or take the consequences."

"I think I will take the consequences," she answered. "I will save Claridge Pasha, if it is possible. It is no boast. I will do it, if it can be done at all, if it is God's will that it should be done; and in doing it I shall be conscious that you and I will do nothing together again—never! But that will not stop me; it will make me do it, the last right thing, before the end."

She was so quiet, so curiously quiet. Her words had a strange solemnity, a tragic apathy. What did it mean? He had gone too far, as he had done before. He had blundered viciously, as he had blundered before.

She spoke again before he could collect his thoughts and make reply.

"I did not ask for too much, I think, and I could have forgiven and forgotten all the hurts you have given me, if it were not for one thing. You have been unjust, hard, selfish, and suspicious. Suspicious—of me! No one else in all the world ever thought of me what you have thought. I have done all I could. I have honourably kept the faith. But you have spoiled it all. I have no memory that I care to keep. It is stained. My eyes can never bear to look upon the past again, the past with you— never."

She turned to leave the room. He caught her arm. "You will wait till you hear what I have to say," he cried in anger. Her last words had stung him so, her manner was so pitilessly scornful. It was as though she looked down on him from a height. His old arrogance fought for mastery over his apprehension. What did she know? What did she mean? In any case he must face it out, be strong—and merciful and affectionate afterwards.

"Wait, Hylda," he said. "We must talk this out."

She freed her arm. "There is nothing to talk out," she answered. "So far as our relations are concerned, all reason for talk is gone." She drew the fatal letter from the sash at her waist. "You will think so too when you read this letter again." She laid it on the table beside him, and, as he opened and glanced at it, she left the room.

He stood with the letter in his hand, dumfounded. "Good God!" he said, and sank into a chair.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FAITH JOURNEYS TO LONDON

Faith withdrew her eyes from Hylda's face, and they wandered helplessly over the room. They saw, yet did not see; and even in her trouble there was some subconscious sense softly commenting on the exquisite refinement and gentle beauty which seemed to fill the room; but the only definite objects which the eyes registered at the moment were the flowers filling every corner. Hylda had been lightly adjusting a clump of roses when she entered; and she had vaguely noticed how pale was the face that bent over the flowers, how pale and yet how composed—as she had seen a Quaker face, after some sorrow had passed over it, and left it like a quiet sea in the sun, when wreck and ruin were done. It was only a swift impression, for she could think of but one thing, David and his safety. She had come to Hylda, she said, because of Lord Eglington's position, and she could not believe that the Government would see David's work undone and David killed by the slave-dealers of Africa.

Hylda's reply had given her no hope that Eglington would keep the promise he had made that evening long ago when her father had come upon them by the old mill, and because of which promise she had forgiven Eglington so much that was hard to forgive. Hylda had spoken with sorrowful decision, and then this pause had come, in which Faith tried to gain composure and strength. There was something strangely still in the two women. From the far past, through Quaker ancestors, there had come to Hylda now this grey mist of endurance and self-control and austere reserve. Yet behind it all, beneath it all, a wild heart was beating.

Presently, as they looked into each other's eyes, and Faith dimly apprehended something of Hylda's distress and its cause, Hylda leaned over and spasmodically pressed her hand.

"It is so, Faith," she said. "They will do nothing. International influences are too strong." She paused. "The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs will do nothing; but yet we must hope. Claridge Pasha has saved himself in the past; and he may do so now, even though it is all ten times worse. Then, there is another way. Nahoum Pasha can save him, if he can be saved. And I am going to Egypt—to Nahoum."

Faith's face blanched. Something of the stark truth swept into her brain. She herself had suffered—her own life had been maimed, it had had its secret bitterness. Her love for her sister's son was that of a mother, sister, friend combined, and he was all she had in life. That he lived, that she might cherish the thought of him living, was the one thing she had; and David must be saved, if that might be; but this

girl—was she not a girl, ten years younger than herself?—to go to Egypt to do—what? She herself lived out of the world, but she knew the world! To go to Egypt, and—"Thee will not go to Egypt. What can thee do?" she pleaded, something very like a sob in her voice. "Thee is but a woman, and David would not be saved at such a price, and I would not have him saved so. Thee will not go. Say thee will not. He is all God has left to me in life; but thee to go—ah, no! It is a bitter world—and what could thee do?"

Hylde looked at her reflectively. Should she tell Faith all, and take her to Egypt? No, she could not take her without telling her all, and that was impossible now. There might come a time when this wise and tender soul might be taken into the innermost chambers, when all the truth might be known; but the secret of David's parentage was Eglington's concern most of all, and she would not speak now; and what was between Nahoum and David was David's concern; and she had kept his secret all these years. No, Faith might not know now, and might not come with her. On this mission she must go alone.

Hylde rose to her feet, still keeping hold of Faith's hand. "Go back to Hamley and wait there," she said, in a colourless voice. "You can do nothing; it may be I can do much. Whatever can be done I can do, since England will not act. Pray for his safety. It is all you can do. It is given to some to work, to others to pray. I must work now."

She led Faith towards the door; she could not endure more; she must hold herself firm for the journey and the struggle before her. If she broke down now she could not go forward; and Faith's presence roused in her an emotion almost beyond control.

At the door she took both of Faith's hands in hers, and kissed her cheek. "It is your place to stay; you will see that it is best. Good-bye," she added hurriedly, and her eyes were so blurred that she could scarcely see the graceful, demure figure pass into the sunlit street.

That afternoon Lord Windlehurst entered the Duchess of Snowdon's presence hurried and excited. She started on seeing his face.

"What has happened?" she asked breathlessly. "She is gone," he answered. "Our girl has gone to Egypt."

The Duchess almost staggered to her feet. "Windlehurst—gone!" she gasped.

"I called to see her. Her ladyship had gone into the country, the footman said. I saw the butler, a faithful soul, who would die—or clean the area steps—for her. He was discreet; but he knew what you and I are to her. It was he got the tickets—for Marseilles and Egypt."

The Duchess began to cry silently. Big tears ran down a face from which the glow of feeling had long fled, but her eyes were sad enough.

"Gone—gone! It is the end!" was all she could say. Lord Windlehurst frowned, though his eyes were moist. "We must act at once. You must go to Egypt, Betty. You must catch her at Marseilles. Her boat does not sail for three days. She thought it went sooner, as it was advertised to do. It is delayed—I've found that out. You can start to-night, and— and save the situation. You will do it, Betty?"

"I will do anything you say, as I have always done." She dried her eyes.

"She is a good girl. We must do all we can. I'll arrange everything for you myself. I've written this paragraph to go into the papers to-morrow morning: 'The Duchess of Snowdon, accompanied by Lady Eglington, left London last night for the Mediterranean via Calais, to be gone for two months or more.' That is simple and natural. I'll see Eglington. He must make no fuss. He thinks she has gone to Hamley, so the butler says. There, it's all clear. Your work is cut out, Betty, and I know you will do it as no one else can."

"Oh, Windlehurst," she answered, with a hand clutching at his arm, "if we fail, it will kill me."

"If she fails, it will kill her," he answered, "and she is very young. What is in her mind, who can tell? But she thinks she can help Claridge somehow. We must save her, Betty."

"I used to think you had no real feeling, Windlehurst. You didn't show it," she said in a low voice. "Ah, that was because you had too much," he answered. "I had to wait till you had less." He took out his watch.

GLOSSARY

Aiwa—Yes.
Allah hu Achbar—God is most Great.
Al'mah—Female professional singers, signifying "a learned female."
Ardab—A measure equivalent to five English bushels.

Backsheesh—Tip, *douceur*.
Balass—Earthen vessel for carrying water.
Bdsha—Pasha.
Bersim—Clover.
Bismillah—In the name of God.
Bowdb—A doorkeeper.

Dahabieh—A Nile houseboat with large lateen sails.
Darabukkeh—A drum made of a skin stretched over an earthenware funnel.
Dourha—Maize.

Effendina—Most noble.
El Azhar—The Arab University at Cairo.

Fedddn—A measure of land representing about an acre.
Fellah—The Egyptian peasant.

Ghiassa—Small boat.

Hakim—Doctor.
Hasheesh—Leaves of hemp.

Inshallah—God willing.

Kdnoon—A musical instrument like a dulcimer.
Kavass—An orderly.
Kemengeh—A cocoanut fiddle.
Khamsin—A hot wind of Egypt and the Soudan.

Kourbash—A whip, often made of rhinoceros hide.

La ilaha illa-llah—There is no deity but God.

Malaish—No matter.
Malboos—Demented.
Mastaba—A bench.
Medjidie—A Turkish Order.
Mooshrabieh—Lattice window.
Moufettish—High Steward.
Mudir—The Governor of a
Mudirieh, or province.
Muezzin—The sheikh of the mosque who calls to prayer.

Narghileh—A Persian pipe.
Nebool—A quarter-staff.

Ramadan—The Mahommedan season of fasting.

Saadat-el-bdsha—Excellency Pasha.
Sdis—Groom.
Sakkia—The Persian water-wheel.
Salaam—Eastern salutation.
Sheikh-el-beled—Head of a village.

Tarboosh—A Turkish turban.

Ulema—Learned men.

Wakf—Mahommedan Court dealing with succession, etc.
Welee—A holy man or saint.

Yashmak—A veil for the lower part of the face.
Yelek—A long vest or smock.

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