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NATALIE

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

AUTHOR OF "THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S," "THEO,"

ETC. ETC.

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NATALIE

A STORY OF THE LATIN QUARTER.

"HE is one of the Americans," his fellow *locataires* said among themselves. "Poor and alone and in bad health. A queer fellow."

Having made this reply to those who questioned them, they were in the habit of dismissing the subject lightly. After all it was nothing to them, since he had never joined their circle.

They were a gay, good-natured lot and made a point of regarding life as airily as possible and taking each day as it came with fantastic good cheer. The house—which stood in one of the shabbiest corners of the Latin Quarter—was full of them from floor to garret—artists, students, models, French, English, Americans, living all of them merrily, by no means the most regular lives.

But there were good friends among them; their world was their own and they found plenty of sympathy in their loves and quarrels, their luck and ill-luck. Upon the whole there was more ill-luck than luck. Lucky men did not choose for their head-quarters such places as this rather dilapidated building,—they could afford to go elsewhere, to places where the Quarter was better, where the stairs were less rickety, the passages less dark and the *conceirge* not given to chronic intoxication. Here came the unlucky ones, whose ill-luck was of various orders and degrees: the young ones who were some day to paint pictures which would be seen in the Palais de l'Industrie and would be greeted with acclamations by an appreciative public; the older ones who had painted pictures which had been seen at the Palais de l'Industrie and had not been appreciated at all; the poets whose sonnets were of too subtle an order to reach the common herd; the students who had lived beyond the means allowed them by their highly respectable families and who were consequently somewhat off color in the eyes of the respectable families in question—these and others of the same class, all more or less poor, more or

less out at elbows and more or less in debt. And yet, as I have said, they lived gayly. They painted, and admired or criticised each other's pictures; they lent and borrowed with equal freedom; they bemoaned their wrongs loudly, and sang and laughed more loudly still as the mood seized them; and any special ill-fortune befalling one of their number generally aroused a display of sympathy which, though it might not last long, was always a source of consolation to the luckless one.

But the American, notwithstanding he had been in the house for months, had never become one of them. He had been seen in the early spring going up the stairway to his room, which was a mere garret on the sixth story, and it had been expected among them that in a day or so he would present himself for inspection. But this he did not do, and when he encountered any of their number in his out-goings or in-comings he returned their greetings gently in imperfect French. He spoke slowly and with difficulty, but there was no coldness in his voice or manners, and yet none got much further than the greeting.

He was a young fellow, scarcely of middel

height, frail in figure, hollow-chested, and with a gentle face and soft, deeply set dark eyes. That he worked hard and lived barely it was easy enough to discover. Part of each day he spent in the various art galleries and after his return from these visits he was seen no more until the following morning.

"Until the last ray of light disappears he is at his easel," said a young student whom a gay escapade had temporarily banished to the fifth floor. "I hear him move now and then and cough. He has a villanous cough."

"He is one of the enthusiasts," said another. "One can read it in his face. What fools they are—these enthusiasts! They throw away life that a crown of laurel may be laid upon their coffins."

In the summer some of them managed to leave Paris, and the rest had enough to do to organize their little excursions and make the best of the sunshine, shade and warmth. But when those who had been away returned and all settled down for the winter, they found the "American," as they called him, in his old place. He had not been away at all; he had worked as hard as ever through midsummer heat and autumn rain; he

was frailer in figure, his clothes were more worn, his face was thinner and his eyes far too hollow and bright, but he did not look either discouraged or unhappy.

"How does he live?" exclaimed the *concierge* dramatically. "The good God knows! He eats nothing, he has no fire, he wears the clothing of midsummer—he paints—he paints—he paints! Perhaps that is enough for him. It would not be for me."

At this time—just as the winter entered with bleak winds and rains and falls of powdery snow—there presented herself among them an arrival whose appearance created a sensation.

One night, on his way upstairs, the American found himself confronted on the fourth floor by a flood of light streaming through the open door of a before unoccupied room. It was a small room, meagerly furnished, but there was a fire in it and half a dozen people who laughed and talked at the top of their voices. Five of them were men he had seen before,—artists who lived in the house,—but the sixth was a woman whom he had never seen and whose marvelous beauty held him spell-bound where he stood.

She was a woman of twenty-two or three, with an oval face whose fairness was the fairness of ivory. She was dark-eyed and low-browed, and as she leaned forward upon the table and looked up at the man who spoke to her, even the bright glow of the lamp, which burned directly before her face, showed no flaw in either tint or outline.

"Why should we ask the reason of your return?" said the man. "Let us rejoice that you are here."

"I will tell you the reason," she answered, without lowering her eyes. "I was tired."

"A good reason," was the reply.

She pushed her chair back and stood upright; her hands hung at her sides; the men were all looking at her; she smiled down at them with fine irony.

"Who among you wishes to paint me?" she said. "I am again at your service and I am not less handsome than I was."

Then there arose among them a little rapturous murmur and somehow it broke the spell which had rested upon the man outside. He started, shivered slightly and turned away. He went up to the bare coldness of his own room and sat down, forgetting that it was either cold or bare. Sud-

denly, as he had looked at the woman's upturned face, a great longing had seized upon him.

"I should like to paint you—I," he found himself saying to the silence about him. "If *I* might paint you!"

He heard the next day who she was. The *concierge* was ready enough to give him more information than he had asked.

"Mademoiselle Natalie, Monsieur means," he said; "a handsome girl that; a celebrated model. They all know her. Her face has been the foundation of more than one great picture. There are not many like her. One model has this beauty—another that; but she, *mon Dieu,* she has all. A great creature, Mademoiselle."

Afterward, as the days went by, he found that she sat often to the other artists. Sometimes he saw her as she went to their rooms or came away; sometimes he caught a glimpse of her as he passed her open door, and each time there stirred afresh within him the longing he had felt at first. So it came about that one afternoon, as she came out of a studio in which she had been giving a sitting, she found waiting outside for her the thinly clad, frail figure of the American. He made an eager

yet hesitant step forward, and began to speak awkwardly in French.

She stopped him.

"Speak English," she said, "I know it well."

"Thank you," he answered simply, "that is a great relief. My French is so bad. I am here to ask a great favor from you, and I am sure I could not ask it well in French."

"What is the favor?" she inquired, looking at him with some wonder.

He was a new type to her, with his quiet directness of speech and his gentle manner.

"I have heard that you are a professional model," he replied, "and I have wished very much to paint what—what I see in your face. I have wished it from the first hour I saw you. The desire haunts me. But I am a very poor man; I have almost nothing; I cannot pay you what the rest do. To-day I came to the desperate resolve that I would throw myself upon your mercy—that I would ask you to sit to me, and wait until better fortune comes."

She stood still a moment and gazed at him.

"Monsieur," she said at length, "are you so poor as that?"

He colored a little, but it was not as if with shame.

"Yes," he answered, "I am very poor. I have asked a great deal of you, have I not?"

She gave him still another long look.

"No," she said, "I will come to you to-morrow if you will direct me to your room."

"It is on the sixth floor." he replied; "the highest of all. It is a bare little place."

"I will come," she said, and was turning away when he stopped her.

"I—I should like to tell you how grateful I am—" he began.

"There is no need," she responded with bitter lightness. "You will pay me some day—when you are a great artist." But when she reached the next landing she glanced down and saw that he still stood beneath, watching her.

The next day she kept her word and went to him. She found his room poorer and barer even than she had fancied it might be. The ceiling was low and slanting; in one corner stood a narrow iron bedstead, in another a wooden table; in the best light the small window gave his easel was placed with a chair before it.

When he had opened the door in answer to her summons, and she saw all this, she glanced quickly at his face to see if there was any shade of confusion upon it, but there was none. He appeared only rejoiced and eager.

"I felt sure it was you," he said.

"Were you then so sure that I would come?" she asked.

"You said you would," he answered. He placed her as he wished to paint her, and then sat down to his work. In a few moments he was completely absorbed in it. For a long time he did not speak at all. The utter silence which reigned —a silence which was not only a suspension of speech but a suspension of any other thought beyond his task—was a new experience to her. His cheek flushed, his eyes burned dark and bright; it seemed as if he scarcely breathed. When he turned to look at her she was conscious each time of a sudden thrill of feeling. More than once he paused for several moments, brush and palette in hand, simply watching her face. At one of these pauses she herself broke the silence.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked.

"You look at me as if—as if——" And she broke off with an uneasy little laugh.

He roused himself with a slight start and colored sensitively, passing his hand across his forehead.

"What I want to paint is not always in your face," he answered. "Sometimes I lose it, and then I must wait a little until—until I find it again. It is not only your face I want, it is yourself—yourself!" And he made a sudden uncon scious gesture with his hands.

She tried to laugh again,—hard and lightly as before,—but failed.

"Myself!" she said. "*Mon Dieu!* Do not grasp at me, Monsieur. It will not pay you. Paint my flesh, my hair, my eyes,—they are good, —but do not paint *me*."

He looked troubled.

"I am afraid my saying that sounded stilted," he returned. "I explained myself poorly. It is not easy for me to explain myself well."

"I understood," she said; "and I have warned you."

They did not speak to each other again during the whole sitting except once, when he asked her if she was warm enough.

"I have a fire to-day," he said.

"Have you not always a fire?" she asked.

"No," he answered with a smile; "but when you come there will always be one."

"Then," she said; "I will come often, that I may save you from death."

"Oh!" he replied; "it is easier than you think to forget that one is cold."

"Yes," she returned. "And it is easier than you think for one to die."

When she was going away, she made a movement towards the easel, but he stopped her.

"Not yet," he said. "Not just yet."

She drew back.

"I have never cared to look at myself before," she said. "I do not know why I should care now. Perhaps," with the laugh again, "it is that I wish to see what you will make of *me!*"

Afterward, as she sat over her little porcelain stove in her room below, she scarcely comprehended her own mood.

"He is not like the rest," she said. "He knows nothing of the world. He is one of the good. He cares only for his art. How simple, and kind, and pure! The little room is like a saint's cell."

And then, suddenly, she flung her arms out wearily, with a heavy sigh. "Ah, *Dieu!*" she said, "how dull the day is! The skies are lead!"

A few days later she gave a sitting to an old artist whose name was Masson, and she found that he had heard of what had happened.

"And so you sit to the American," he said.

"Yes."

"Well—and you find him——?"

"I find him," she repeated after him. "Shall I tell you what I find him?"

"I shall listen with delight."

"I find him—a soul! You and I, my friend—and the rest of us—are bodies; he is a soul!"

The artist began to whistle softly as he painted.

"It is dangerous work," he said at length, "for women to play with souls."

"That is true," she answered, coldly.

The same day she went again to the room on the sixth floor. She sat again through an hour of silence in which the American painted eagerly, now and then stopping to regard her with searching eyes.

"But not as the rest regard me," she said to herself. "He forgets that it is a woman

who sits here. He sees only what he would paint."

As time went by, this fact, which she always felt, was in itself a fascination.

In the chill, calm atmosphere of the place there was repose for her. She found nothing to resent, nothing to steel herself against, she need no longer think of herself at all. She had time to think of the man in whose presence she sat. From the first she had seen something touching in his slight stooping figure, thin young face and dark womanish eyes, and after she had heard the simple uneventful history of his life, she found them more touching still.

He was a New Englander, the last surviving representative of a frail and short-lived family· His parents had died young, leaving him quite alone, with a mere pittance to depend upon, and throughout his whole life he had cherished but one aim.

"When I was a child I used to dream of coming here," he said, "and as I grew older I worked and struggled for it. I knew I must gain my end some day and the time came when it was gained."

"And this is the end?" she asked, glancing

round at the poor place. "This is all of life you desire?"

He did not look up at her.

"It is all I have," he answered.

She wondered if he would not ask her some questions regarding herself, but he did not.

"He does not care to know," she thought sullenly. And then she told herself that he did know, and a mocking devil of a smile settled on her lips and was there when he turned towards her again.

But the time never came when his manner altered, when he was less candid and gentle, or less grateful for the favor she was bestowing upon him.

She scarcely knew how it was that she first began to know the sound of his foot upon the stairway and to listen for it. Her earliest consciousness of it was when once she awakened suddenly out of a dead sleep at night and found herself sitting upright with her hand upon her heavily throbbing heart.

"What is it?" she cried in a loud whisper. But she spoke only to herself and the darkness. She knew what it was and did not lie down again until the footsteps had reached the top of the

last flight and the door above had opened and closed.

The time arrived when there was scarcely a trifling incident in his every-day life which escaped her. She saw each sign of his poverty and physical weakness. He grew paler day by day. There were days when his step flagged as he went up and down the staircase; some mornings he did not go out at all. She discovered that each Sunday he went twice to the little American chapel in the Rue de Berri, and she had seen in his room a small Protestant Bible.

"You read that?" she asked him when she first saw it.

"Yes."

She leaned forward, her look curious, bewildered, even awed.

"And you believe in—God?"

"Yes."

She resumed her former position, but she did not remove her eyes from his face, and unconsciously she put her hand up to her swelling throat.

When at length the sitting was over and she left her chair he was standing before the easel. He turned to her and spoke hesitantly.

"Will you come and look at it?" he asked.

She went and stood where he bade her and looked. He watched her anxiously while she did so. For the first moment there was amazement in her face, then some mysterious emotion he could not comprehend—a dull red crept slowly over brow and cheek.

She turned upon him.

"Monsieur!" she cried, passionately. "You mock me! It is a bad picture."

He fell back a pace, staring at her and suddenly trembling with the shock.

"A bad picture!" he echoed. "*I* mock you—*I?*"

"It is my face," she said, pointing to it, "but you have made it what *I* am not! It is the face of a good woman—of a woman who might be a saint! Does not *that* mock me?"

He turned to it with a troubled, dreamy look.

"It is what I have seen in your face," he said in a soft, absent voice. "It is a truth to me. It is what *I* have seen."

"It is what no other has seen," she said. "I tell you it mocks me."

"It need not mock you," he answered. "I

could not have painted it if I had not felt it. It is yourself—yourself."

"Myself?" she said. "Do you think, Monsieur, that the men who have painted me before would know it?"

She gave it another glance and a shrill laugh burst from her, but the next instant it broke off and ended in another sound. She fell upon her knees by the empty chair, her open hands flung outward, her sobs strangling her.

He stood quite near her, looking down.

"I have not thought of anything but my work," he said. "Why should I?"

The following Sunday night the artist Masson met in going downstairs a closely veiled figure coming up. He knew it and spoke.

"What, Natalie?" he said. "You? One might fancy you had been to church."

"I have been," she returned in a cold voice,—"to the church of the Americans in the Rue de Berri."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Has it done you good?" he asked.

"No," she answered, and walked past him leaving him to look after her and think the matter over.

She went to her own apartment and locked herself in. Having done so, she lighted every candle and lamp—flooding the place with a garish mockery of brightness. She sang as she did it—a gay, shrill air from some *opéra bouffe.* She tore off her dark veil and wrappings. Her eyes and cheeks flamed as if touched by some unholy fire. She moved with feverish rapidity here and there—dragging a rich dress from a trunk, and jewels and laces from their places of safe keeping, and began to attire herself in them. The simple black robe she had worn to the chapel lay on the floor. As she moved to and fro she set her feet upon it again and again, and as she felt it beneath her tread a harsh smile touched her lips.

"I shall not wear you again," she stopped her song once to say.

In half an hour she had made her toilette. She stood before her glass, a blaze of color and jewels. For a moment she sang no more. From one of the rooms below there floated up to her sounds of riotous merriment.

"*This* is myself," she said ; "*this* is no other."

She opened her door and ran down the staircase swiftly and lightly. The founder of the feast

whose sounds she had heard was a foolish young fellow who adored her madly. He was rich, and wicked, and simple. Because he had heard of her return he had taken an apartment in the house. She heard his voice above the voices of the rest.

In a moment she had flung open the door of the *salon* and stood upon the threshold.

At sight of her there arose a rapturous shout of delight.

"Natalie! Natalie! Welcome!"

But instantaneously it died away. One second she stood there, brilliant, smiling, defiant. The next, they saw that a mysterious change had seized upon her. She had become deathly white, and was waving them from her with a wild gesture.

"I am not coming!" she cried, breathlessly. "No! No! No!"

And the next instant they could only gaze at each others' terror-stricken faces, at the place she had left vacant—for she was gone.

She went up the stairs blindly and uncertainly. When she reached the turn of the fourth floor where the staircase was bare and unlighted, she

staggered and sank against the balustrades, her face upturned.

"I cannot go back," she whispered to the darkness and silence above. "Do you hear? I cannot! And it is you—you who restrain me!"

But there were no traces of her passion in her face when she went to the little studio the next day as usual. When the artist opened the door for her, it struck him that she was calm even to coldness.

Instead of sitting down, she went to the easel and stood before it.

"Monsieur," she said, "I have discovered where your mistake lies. You have tried to paint what you fancied must once have existed, though it exists no longer. That is your mistake. It has never existed at all. I remember no youth, no childhood. Life began for me as it will end. It was my fate that it should. I was born in the lowest quarter of Paris. I knew only poverty, brutality, and crime. My beauty simply raised me beyond their power. Where should I gain what you have insisted in bestowing upon me?"

He simply stood still and looked at her.

"God knows!" he answered at length. "I do not."

"God!" she returned, with her bitter little laugh. "Yes—God!"

Then she went to her place, and said no more.

But the next Sunday she was at the American chapel again, and the next, and the next. She could scarcely have told why herself. She did not believe the doctrines she heard preached, and she did not expect to be converted to belief in them. Often, as the service proceeded, a faint smile of derision curved her lips; but from her seat in the obscure corner she had chosen she could see a thin, dark face and a stooping figure, and could lean back against the wall with a sense of repose.

"It is quiet here," was her thought. "One can be quiet, and that is much."

"What is the matter with her?" the men who knew her began to ask one another. But it was not easy for them to discover how the subtle change they saw had been wrought. They were used to her caprices and to occasional fits of sullenness, but they had never seen her in just such a mood as she was now. She would bear

no jests from them, she would not join in their gaieties. Sometimes for days together she shut herself up in her room and they did not see her at all.

The picture progressed but slowly. Sometimes the artist's hand so trembled with weakness that he could not proceed with his work. More than once Natalie saw the brush suddenly fall from his nerveless fingers. He was very weak in these days, and the spot of hectic red glowed brightly on his cheek.

"I am a poor fellow at best," he would say to her, "and now I am at my worst. I am afraid I shall be obliged to rest sooner than I fancied. I wish first I could have finished my work. I must not leave it unfinished."

One morning, when he had been obliged to give up painting, through a sudden fit of prostration, on following her to the door, he took her hand and held it a moment.

"I was awake all last night," he said. "Yesterday I saw a poor fellow who had fallen ill on the street, carried into the Hôtel Dieu, and the memory clung to me. I began to imagine how it would be if such a thing happened to me—

what I should say when they asked for my friends, —how there would be none to send for. And at last, suddenly I thought of you. I said to myself, 'I would send for her, and I think she would come.'"

"Yes, Monsieur," she answered. "You might depend upon my coming."

"I am used to being alone," he went on; "but it seemed to me as I lay in the dark thinking it over, that to die alone would be a different matter. One would want some familiar face to look at——"

"Monsieur!" she burst forth. "You speak as if Death were always near you!"

"Do I?" he said. And he was silent for a few seconds and looked down at her hand as he held it. Then he dropped it gently with a little sigh. "Good-bye," he said, and so they parted.

In the afternoon she sat to Masson.

"How much longer," he said to her in the course of the sitting,—"how much longer does he mean to live—this American? He has lasted astonishingly. They are wonderful fellows, these weaklings who burn themselves out. One might

fancy that the flame which finally destroys them, also kept them alive."

"Do you then think that he is so very ill?" she asked in a low voice.

"He will go out," he answered, "like a candle. Shall I tell you a secret?"

She made a gesture of assent.

"He starves! The *concierge* who has watched him says he does not buy food enough to keep body and soul together. But how is one to offer him anything? It is easy to see that he would not take it."

There was a moment of silence, in which he went on painting.

"The trouble is," he said at last, "that a man would not know how to approach him. It is only women who can do these things."

Until the sitting was over neither the one nor the other spoke again. When it was over and Natalie was on the point of leaving the room, Masson looked at her critically.

"You are pale," he remarked. "You are like a ghost."

"Is it not becoming?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then why complain?"

She went to her own room and spent half an hour in collecting every valuable she owned. They were not many; she had always been recklessly improvident. She put together in a package her few jewels, and even the laces she considered worth the most. Then she went out, and, taking a *fiacre* at the nearest corner, drove away.

She was absent two hours, and when she returned she stopped at the entrance, intending to ask the *concierge* a question. But the man himself spoke first. He was evidently greatly disturbed and not a little alarmed.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "the young man on the sixth floor ——"

"What of him?" she demanded.

"He desires to see you. He went out in spite of my warnings. Figure to yourself on such a day, in such a state of health. He returned almost immediately, wearing the look of Death itself. He sank upon the first step of the staircase. When I rushed to his assistance he held to his lips a handkerchief stained with blood! We were compelled to carry him upstairs."

She stood a moment, feeling her throat and lips suddenly become dry and parched.

"And he asked—for me?" she said at last.

"When he would speak, Mademoiselle—yes. We do not know why. He said, in a very faint voice, 'She said she would come.'"

She went up the staircase slowly and mechanically, as one who moves in a dream. And yet when she reached the door of the studio she was obliged to wait for a few seconds before opening it. When she did open it she saw the attic seemed even more cold and bare than usual; that there was no fire; that the American lay upon the bed, his eyes closed, the hectic spots faded from his cheeks. But when she approached and stood near him, he opened his eyes and looked at her with a faint smile.

"If—I play you—the poor trick of—dying," he said, "you will remember—that the picture—if you care for it—is yours."

After a while, the doctor, who had been sent for, arrived. Perhaps he had been in no great hurry when he had heard that his services were required by an artist who lay in a garret in the Latin Quarter. His visit was a short one. He

asked a few questions, wrote a prescription, and went away. He looked at Natalie oftener than at the sick man. She followed him out on to the landing, and then he regarded her with greater interest than before.

"He is very ill?" she said.

"Yes," he answered. "He will die, of course, sooner or later."

"You speak calmly, Monsieur," she said.

"Such cases are an old story," he replied. "And—you are not his wife?"

"No."

"I thought not. Nevertheless, perhaps you will remain with him until——"

"As Monsieur says," she returned, "I will remain with him 'until——'"

When the sick man awoke from the sleep into which he had fallen, a fire burned in the stove and a woman's figure was seated before it.

"You are here yet?" he said faintly. She rose and moved toward him.

"I am not going away," she answered, "if you will permit me to remain."

His eyes shone with pathetic brightness, and he put out his hand.

"You are very kind—to a poor—weak fellow," he whispered. "After all—it is a desolate thing—to lie awake through the night—in a place like this."

When the doctor returned the next morning, he appeared even a shade disconcerted. He had thought it quite likely that, upon his second visit, he might find a scant white sheet drawn over the narrow bed, and that it would not be necessary for him to remain or call again; but it appeared that his patient might require his attention yet a few days longer.

"You have not left him at all," he said to Natalie. "It is easy to see you did not sleep last night."

It was true that she had not slept. Through the night she had sat in the dim glow of the fire, scarcely stirring unless some slight sound of movement from the bed attracted her attention. During the first part of the night her charge had seemed to sleep; but as the hours wore on there had been no more rest for him, and then she had known that he lay with his eyes fixed upon her; she had felt their gaze even before she had turned to meet it. Just before the dawn he became restless, and called her to his side.

"I owe you a heavy debt," he said drearily. "And I shall leave it unpaid. I wish—I wish it was finished."

"It?" she said.

"The picture," he answered, "the—picture."

Usually he was too weak for speech; but occasionally a fit of restlessness seized upon him, and then it seemed as if he was haunted continually by the memory of his unfinished work.

"It only needed a few touches," he said once. "One day of strength would complete it—if such a day would but come to me. I know the look so well now—I see it on your face so often." And then he lay watching her, his eyes following her yearningly, as she moved to and fro.

In the studios below, the artists waited in vain for their model. They neither saw nor heard anything of her, and they knew her moods too well to be officiously inquisitive. So she was left alone to the task she had chosen, and was faithful to it to the end.

It was not so very long it lasted, though to her it seemed a life-time. A few weeks the doctor made his visits, and at last one afternoon, in going away, he beckoned her out of the room.

He spoke in an undertone.

"To-night you may watch closely," he said; "perhaps towards morning—but it will be very quiet."

It was very quiet. The day had been bitter cold and as it drew to a close it became colder still, and a fierce wind rose and whistled about the old house, shaking the ill-fitting windows and doors. But the sick man did not seem to hear it. Towards midnight he fell into a deep and quiet sleep.

Before the fire Natalie sat waiting. Now and then a little shudder passed over her as if she could not resist the cold. And yet the fire in the stove was a bright one. She had smiled to herself as she had heaped the coal upon it, seeing that there was so little left.

"It will last until morning," she said, "and that will be long enough." Through all the nights during which she had watched she had never felt the room so still as it seemed now between the gusts and soughing of the wind. "Something is in the air which has not been in it before," she said.

About one o'clock she rose and replenished the

fire, putting the last fragment of coal upon it and then sat down to watch it again.

Its slow kindling and glowing into life fascinated her. It was not long before she could scarcely remove her eyes from it. She was trying to calculate—with a weird fancy in her mind—how long it would last, and whether it would die out suddenly or slowly.

As she cowered over it, if one of the men who admired her had entered he might well scarcely have known her. She was hollow-eyed, haggard and pallid—for the time even her great beauty was gone. As he had left her that day, the doctor had said to himself discontentedly that after all these wonderful faces last but a short time.

The fire caught at the coal, lighted fitful blazes among it, and crept over it in a dull red, which brightened into hot scarlet.

And the sick man lay sleeping, breathing faintly but lightly.

"It will last until dawn," she said,—"until dawn, and no longer."

When the first cinder dropped with a metallic sound, she started violently and laid her hand upon her breast, but after that she scarcely stirred.

The fitful blazes died down, the hot scarlet deepened to red again, the red grew dull, a gray film of ashes showed itself upon it, and then came the first faint gray of dawn, and she sat with beating heart saying to herself—

"It will go out soon—suddenly." And the dying man was awake, speaking to her.

"Come here," he said in a low, clear voice. "Come here."

She went to him, and stood close by the bedside. The moment of her supreme anguish had come. But he showed no signs of pain or dread, only there was a little moisture upon his forehead and about his mouth.

His eyes shone large and bright in the snowy pallor of his face, and when he fixed them upon her she knew he would not move them away.

"I am glad—that it is—finished," he said. "It did not tire me to work—as I thought it would. I am glad—that it is—finished."

"She fell upon her knees.

"That it is finished?" she said.

His smile grew brighter.

"The picture," he whispered—"the picture."

And then what she had waited for came.

There was a moment of silence ; the wind outside hushed itself, his lips parted, but no sound came from them, not even a fluttering breath ; his eyes were still fixed upon her face, open, bright, smiling.

" I may speak now," she cried. " I may speak now—since you cannot hear. I love you ! I love you !"

But there came to her ears only one sound—the little grating shudder of the fire as it fell together and was dead.

The next morning when they heard that " the American" had at last fulfilled their prophesies, the *locataires* showed a spasmodic warmth of interest. They offered their services promptly, and said to each other that he must have been a good fellow after all—that it was a pity they had not known him better. They even protested that he should not be made an object of charity—that among themselves they would do all that was necessary. But it appeared that their help was not needed—that there was in the background a friend who had done all, but whom nobody knew.

Hearing this they expressed their sympathy by going up by twos and threes to the little garret where there was now only icy coldness and silence.

Not a few among them were so far touched by the pathos they found in this as to shed a tear or so—most of them were volatile young Frenchmen who counted their sensibilities among their luxuries.

Toward evening there came two older than the rest, who had not been long in the house.

When they entered a woman stood at the bed's head—a woman in black drapery, with a pale and haggard face, which they saw only for a moment.

As they approached she moved away, and going to the window stood there with her back toward them, gazing out at the drifted snow upon the roof. The men stood uncovered, looking down.

"It is the face of an Immortal," said the elder of the two. "It is such men who die young."

And then they saw the easel in the shadow of the corner and went and turned it from the wall. When they saw the picture resting upon it, there was a long silence. It was broken at last by the older man.

"It is some woman he has known and loved,"

he said. "He has painted her soul—and his own."

The figure near them stirred—the woman's hand crept up to the window's side and clung to the wooden frame.

But she did not turn, and was standing so when the strangers moved away, opened the door and passed, with heads still uncovered, down the dark rickety stairs.

A fiercer cold had never frozen Paris than held it ice and snow bound through this day and the next. When the next came to its close all was over and the studios were quiet again—perhaps a little quieter for a few hours than was their wont.

Through this second day Natalie lived—slowly: through the first part of the morning in which people went heavily up and down the stairs; through the later hours when she heard them whispering among themselves upon the landings; through the hour when the footsteps that came down were heavier still, and slower and impeded with some burden borne with care; through the moment when they rested with this burden upon

the landing outside her very door, and inside she crouched against the panels—listening.

Then it was all done, and upon those upper floors there was no creature but herself.

She had lighted no fire and eaten nothing. She had neither food, fuel, nor money. All was gone.

"It is well," she said, "that I am not hungry, and that I would rather be colder than warmer."

She did not wish for warmth, even when night fell and brought more biting iciness. She sat by her window in the dark until the moon rose, and though shudders shook her from head to foot, she made no effort to gain warmth. She heard but few sounds from below, but she waited until all was still before she left her place.

But at midnight perfect silence had settled upon the house, and she got up and left her room, leaving the key unturned in the lock. "To-morrow, or the day after, perhaps," she said, "they will wish to go in." Then she went up the stairs for the last time.

Since she had heard the heavy feet lumbering with their burden past her door a singular calm had settled upon her. It was not apathy so much

as a repose born of the knowledge that there was nothing more to bear—no future to be feared.

But when she opened the door of the little room this calmness was for a moment lost.

It was so cold, so still, so bare in the moonlight which streamed through the window and flooded it. There were left in it only two things—the narrow, vacant bed covered with its white sheet, and the easel on which the picture rested, gazing out at her from the canvas with serene, mysterious eyes.

She staggered forward and sank down before it, uttering a low, terrible cry.

"Do not reproach me!" she cried. "There is no longer need. Do you not see? This is my expiation!"

For a while there was dead silence again. She crouched before the easel with bowed head and her face veiled upon her arms, making no stir or sound. But at length she rose again, numbly and stiffly. She stood up and glanced slowly about her—at the bareness, at the moonlight, at the narrow, white-draped bed.

"It will be—very cold," she whispered as

she moved toward the door. "It will be—very cold."

And then the little room was empty, and the face upon the easel turned toward the entrance seemed to listen to her stealthily descending feet.

The next morning, the two artists who had visited the dead man's room together, were walking—together again—upon the banks of the Seine, when they found themselves drawing near a crowd of men and women who were gathered at the water's edge.

"What has happened?" they asked as they approached the group. "What has been found?"

A cheerful fellow in a blue blouse, standing with his hands in his pockets, answered.

"A woman. *Ma foi!* what a night to drown oneself in! Imagine the discomfort!"

The older man pushed his way into the centre, and a moment later uttered an exclamation.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"What is it?" cried his companion.

His friend turned to him, breathlessly pointing to what lay upon the frozen earth.

"We asked each other who the original of the picture was," he said. "We did not know. The face lies there. Look!"

For that which Life had denied her, Death had given.

THE FIRE AT GRANTLEY MILLS.

NOT one of the neighbors knew where she had come from—that was the mystery, and it was doubly a mystery because the people at Grantley, who were mostly rough, busy men and women, generally knew each other's business pretty thoroughly. But this woman,—Phillis Denham her name,—foiled them utterly, and remained a mystery in spite of the efforts of the most curious. She had appeared among them at the Mills one Spring morning (Grantley was a village of mill-hands), and those who lived on one of the most respectable of the narrow streets had seen her come out of a small house which had the day before been unoccupied. And this was all they knew, beyond the later discovery that the cottage was scantily furnished, and yet had an air of neatness not usually seen in Grantley houses, and that

Phillis Denham lived alone, and was either a "Quaker" or a "Methody."

"'Oo isna our loike, at onyrate," said one of the wise ones. "'Oo minces her words loike one o' th' quality, if 'oo does 'thee' and 'thou.'"

She was a young woman, too, and, in a strange, cold, saintly way, a beauty. She had the face of the Madonna, without its soft warmth and tenderness. Her fine eyes were a little hard for the eyes of a woman; her fine mouth had a severe curve; her manner was grave and reserved.

"A woman of stone, my dear," said the good old rector to his wife, after his first parochial call upon the new arrival. "A woman with an injury, I should say, or a woman not easy to understand."

"It was kind of thee to come," Phillis had said to him; "but I am not one of thy people. I belong to the Society of Friends." And even at the end of her visit he had learned not a whit more of her history.

She lived a quiet life, and was a very regular worker. She left her cottage at a certain hour in the early morning, and re-entered it as regularly each evening, never far deviating from her accustomed time. She gained no friends, and made no

enemies. Her home was as neat and trim as herself, and she was the perfection of simple, almost severe, neatness.

"How are we to ca' thee, lass?" asked one of the boldest of her fellow-workers. "Art tha wed or single?"

"Thee may call me Phillis Denham," she said, a flickering color touching her fine, white skin; "that is my name."

So they felt it wiser to ask no more questions, and she was called Phillis Denham and left to herself. She had been living this sort of life for three months when there came to the mills a new hand,—a handsome woman a year or two older than herself,—a woman of a class widely set apart from her,—a woman whose early fading beauty was a shame, and who rebelled against the world and tried to flaunt boldly, despite the haggard misery slowly creeping upon her. They knew her at the Mills. The overseer himself knew her, and greeted her with rough familiarity when she appeared at the offices and demanded work almost as if she had the right to expect it.

"What!" he said. "Back again! Going to try work for a while, are you? Well, I suppose

we shall have to give you a place. There, go along and behave yourself." And then he turned to the owner's eldest son who stood by, and spoke to him half apologetically. "She's a rough enough customer," he said, "but she can do work that few of them are up to, and if she was steady we should be glad enough to keep her at good wages. She has worked here, off and on, ever since she was a girl; and a handsome girl she was, too,—too handsome for her own good, as it turned out."

The woman was not in Phillis Denham's room, and in the crowd that passed out of the iron gates, at the ringing of the great bell at meal times, it chanced that for several days each was hidden from the other. But at the end of the week, in going alone down the stairs one evening, Phillis found herself face to face with the new-comer. The woman started back, with something like an oath upon her lips, a flush, half anger, half shame, reddening her cheeks. Phillis whitened perceptibly, and drew back also, straightening her fine, slight form, and holding aside the folds of her dress with an unconscious gesture which spoke worlds.

"*Thee*—Janet Ayres?" she said.

The woman laughed—a laugh whose angry, scornful sound had yet an undertone of miserable humiliation.

"Aye," she answered, "it's me, Janet Ayres! Has tha owt to say agen it? If tha has, say it, an' be done wi' it,—though I dunnot see how tha can help thysen agen my bein' here."

"Nor I," said Phillis, and she looked down at the creature with a sudden, sharp indrawing of her breath, a wild light leaping into her cold eyes for one instant, then dying out. "Wilt thou let me pass?" she said in a curious, low voice. "I do not wish to harm thee."

Janet Ayres drew back quickly, and almost unconsciously glanced over her shoulder at the great depth of steps below them. Harm her! For that instant the pure, self-righteous woman had actually looked as if her last words might have held a desperate double meaning. And it would have been easy enough to harm her, with that flight of stairs below. A touch would have done it almost. And less deeply wronged women had revenged themselves in such ways before. But the light had died out of Phillis Denham's eyes,

and she passed down the staircase without another word.

She was even unusually pale and silent the next day. The women who worked near her noticed, indeed one of them remembered afterward, that she only spoke once during all the hours of labor, and this once was on hearing the name of Janet Ayres from the lips of the woman at the loom next to her own.

"Th' mesters ha' no reet to tak' such loike nowts," said the speaker roughly. "If it were na for th' choild, poor little wench——"

Phillis looked up with a slight start.

"Friend," said she, "do I understand thee to say the woman has a child?"

"Aye," was the answer, "as pratty a little lass as any honester woman might wish fur—th' Lord help it! Three year owd, or theerabout. Th' parish owt to tak' it to save it fro' goin' its mother's gate."

But though the matter dropped for the time being, this was not the end of it. On her way home that evening Phillis met with a little adventure. One of the luxuries she allowed herself was a weekly bouquet of common flowers, and she was

passing down a narrow street, with a handful of roses and sweet peas, just purchased, when a small hand, thrust through a fence, plucked at her gown, and the sound of a child's voice stopped her.

"Ooman," said the sweet, shrill little pipe; "ooman, gi' us a posy."

She stopped and looked down. She did not often notice children, but the voice of this one, and the soft touch of the small, bold, detaining hand gave her a queer, new feeling. Children did not often notice her, either; she was not the sort of woman to attract a child. The tiny hand plucked at her dress again.

"Gi' us a posy! Gi' us a posy!"

But for a moment or so Phillis did not answer, though it was not the prettiness of the dirty, dimpled face she was looking at so fixedly. It was something else that held her silent—something in the summer blue eyes that struck her with a hard pang.

When she could speak she separated a rose from her flowers and bent down, but the hand with which she offered the blossom trembled, and her voice was strangely unsteady.

"What is thy name?" she asked.

The child fell back a little, regarding her almost distrustfully—the handsome face was so hard for a baby to read.

"Will thee not tell me thy name?" Phillis repeated. "See, here is a rose for thee."

The dimpled hand crept out for the flowers, and then the pretty boldness came back.

"Jenny," said the child. "Ooman, did ta gi' Jenny a posy?"

Phillis stood up.

"Yes," she said, in a tone curious enough to use in speaking to a child; "I gave thee a posy."

That was all. She did not stop to caress the little creature. She passed on with the rest of her flowers in her cold hand, and left it peering through the fence at her. This was the child—*the* child, and its blue eyes had stabbed again the one rankling wound of her life. The little house had never seemed so quiet as it did when she unlocked the door and entered it; the stillness was like the stillness of death. But Phillis did not feel it. She laid her flowers upon the table, went to the fire, stirred the coals, and sat down. The flame shot up, and, lighting up the room, glowed

upon her face, but had not glow enough to flush its pallor.

"It is the child," she said. "*Her* child has lived, while mine——"

Her lips closed, as if in stern resolve. It was part of her creed to force herself to silence. If she had suffered, she had not rebelled by word or deed,—she had not rebelled, even if, in her severe struggle to be calm, she had learned to be cold and hard as she was pure and just.

As she sat before the fire in silence she was battling with herself. It was hard to understand. The stained, lost creature's child had lived, perhaps, to face her wretched mother's wretched fall, and, perhaps, to fall and sin, and flaunt and die, with scarcely a breathing space of innocent childhood to remember in her misery. Her own little one, who had seemed the only breath of pure air left in the world about her, had been torn from her in the hour of her greatest anguish. It was hard to understand. And then her thoughts went back to the face of the child she had seen; such a pretty creature, with its innocent boldness and the summer blue eyes which had so stung her. A sudden thought flashing upon her made her start

before she had been thinking of it two minutes. The blood mounted to her cheeks.

"Nay, nay!" she cried out, as if uncontrollably. "Not that; I could not do that. Its eyes would mock me every hour."

But she had no sooner spoken so than she turned pale again, knowing that it was this thing she must do, and no other. To such a woman there could be only right and wrong; and here, in an instant, the right flashed upon her, and left her no escape. The small, bold hand plucked at her again; but it plucked at her heart. Yet it might have plucked at her heart for ever, if it had not been for this sudden conviction. She had never done a willing wrong in her life, and she had never shirked the right. It was this thing she must do, and no other.

She did not stay to ponder long. She rose from her seat and went about her household tasks. She prepared her usual simple evening meal, and having partook of it, set the room in order. It was her way to be quiet and orderly, and nothing could have made her otherwise. It was quite dark when she had completed her preparations for the morrow, but she evidently intended going out,

for she went into the adjoining room and came out again with a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders.

Then she opened the door, and looked out into the night.

"She may refuse me," she said, in a low, thoughtful voice; "but I must still make an effort. I cannot understand why it is, and yet truly it seems borne upon my mind, that if I should not do this thing, this soul would be required of me."

And then she went out, closing the door after her. She had not far to go,—only a few rods into another street,—only to the cottage where she had seen the child this evening—Janet Ayres's child.

There was a light burning in the room at the front of the house, when she reached it, and as she entered the gate she saw through the window the woman she had come to seek. She was sitting alone, apparently doing nothing, sitting in a strange, listless attitude, her arms folded upon the bare table, her face resting heavily upon them. For one moment Phillis paused. Something in the woman's posture struck her with a sudden sense of discomfort, and made her hesitate—suggesting

to her, however faintly, that even this brazen creature might have her misery also.

She stepped to the door, and standing upon the threshold, hesitated for a second again. Should she knock and risk being refused admission? No, she dare not.

The next minute the door opened, and Janet Ayres raised her head slowly and looked towards it. A slight figure stood at the entrance, and as the gray shawl slipped aside, it showed a face that made her start.

"Thee—Phillis Henders?" she exclaimed.

"Nay," said Phillis, calmly; "Phillis Denham."

The woman laughed.

"Oh," said she, "so that's it, is it? Well, happen th'art in th' right. I dunnot see that it matters so much; I dunnot see as owt matters mysen. Have it thy own way." And then sharply: "What dost ta want here?"

Phillis stepped forward to the table, and laid her hand upon it.

"I could only have come to thee for one thing," she said. "The Lord has given me a work to do. I saw thy child to-day, and I have come to make an appeal to thee. I have come to ask thee to

let me save the little one from being what her mother is." She had no pity on the wretched woman, but it was because she was cold, not because she was cruel. "If the Lord spares her I want to keep her life pure," she said.

Janet Ayres stared at her in blank amaze.

"What!" she cried out. "*Tha* wants to tak' th' child—that child?"

"Ay," said Phillis, with a sudden sharpening in her voice. "Wilt thou give me the child, and keep the man?"

"Th' mon!" cried the woman, with a fierce sneer. "I want neither th' mon nor child. Tha may tak' both."

"Nay, but I will not take them both," answered Phillis, a shrill tone breaking from her, quiet as she tried to seem; "I will not take them both. William Henders chose between me and thee, and he chose thee, and he may stick to thee. He is nought to me, but the child I want; and if thee has woman's blood in thy body, thou canst not say me nay. Thee knows what thy own life has been; does thee want that little one's to be like it? Thee has fed her with thy own strength—unless such as thee are different from other women;

dost thou want to make her curse thee? Nay, but thou hast even a blacker soul than I fancied, if thou dost."

Then Janet Ayres laughed—a laugh even scornful of the stainless, righteous, injured woman, who so scorned and taunted her.

"Tha art a good Christian, Phillis Henders," she said; "aye, but tha art a good Christian; religion and such loike were bred i' thy bones and comes out i' thy flesh. I never knew a Methody yet as didn't show th' breed, an' I never saw a safe soul yet as would na' gi' a lost one a help down th' hill. Look here," her voice shrilling and her face flushing scarlet, "I'm one of th' lost ones mysen, but I never gave a push to either lost or saved yet; an' so help me God,—if God has owt to do with such loike as me,—if I could hurt an' humble thee, even thee, with thy hard words an' thy pride,—if I could crush an' humble thee before my face this minute, in raisin' my finger, I would na raise it; nay, I would na." And she dropped her head upon her arms again, her excitement ending in a passionate burst of sobs and tears. 'Tak' th' child," she cried, "tak' her an' keep her! Teach her what her mother is, an' train her up to

point her finger at her! Aye, I would be willin' fur that, if that would save her—aye, an' thank th' God as has nowt to do with such as me."

Surely some pang of conscience smote her judge. Her pale face grew paler, and her eye was not so steady as it had been. Some fine instinct at work within her made her shrink, for she faltered as she spoke.

"He may have to do with such as thee if thou would repent," she said. "There is time for thee yet."

"Repent!" said Janet Ayres. "Repent thysen. Hast tha nowt to repent on? No, such as thee never has; tha'rt on the narrow path fro' first to last; it wur made fur such as thee. Dunnot tell me to repent."

Phillis's hand trembled a little. That sense of discomfort grew upon her strongly, and it was this lost creature's words that stung her.

"I did not come here to contend with thee," she said. "I came to plead for the child."

"Will Henders's child," put in the woman, with a miserable effort at a taunt.

"Will Henders's child," said Phillis, without a change in her voice. "Will thee give it up to me?"

Janet Ayres lifted her face with a strange irony in her smile.

"Tha art na askin' much," she said.

"I ask thee for a human soul," answered Phillis.

"Aye," said Janet Ayres, "but such as me dunnot know much about that theer. Tha art askin' me fur all as I've gotten i'. th' earth—thee has niver had a child o' thy own."

"Thou art mistaken," said Phillis, "I had a child who died."

"Tha!" exclaimed Janet.

But Phillis stopped her with a gesture.

"It died," she said, "and it belonged—poor little one!—to a past that is all over. But this child of thine is not so safe."

"If that is true I can trust thee better," said the woman, "not but what I believe tha'd do reet by th' little un, hard as tha art. It's thy way to do reet."

There was a pause for a moment, and then she looked up.

"I do not see what sent thee here to tempt me to-neet," she said. "I have often thowt o' this, but I niver thowt as I've done to-neet. I niver

thowt as I were thinkin' when tha came in. Aye, Janie, little wench—Janie!" with a gush of tears. "Come wi' me," she said abruptly to Phillis, rising and taking the lamp from the table.

Phillis followed her across the room to the shaded corner where the child's cot stood, and there they paused.

"Look," said Janet Ayres, holding the light over the pink, flushed baby face.

Phillis did not speak; the eyes that had mocked her so were closed; but it was not easy to forget the pang they had given her.

"If I gi' her up to thee," said Janet, "I shall gi' her up foriver. Her way will not be my way either now nor—nor after—if theer is an after. If I gi' her up to thee I shanna do it by halves. I shall gi' her up to be led to heaven while I drift down to hell. Aye, Janie! Janie!" dropping upon her knees, "thou'lt be further away fro' me then e'en than tha art now—but better one than two—better one than two—better me than thee, my lamb, for tha has na a spot upon thee."

Her weeping shook even Phillis Denham, though it was neither loud nor long. It did not even waken the child though it seemed as if the struggle tore

her very soul. But suddenly she got up, and taking the little one from its pillow, kissed it once, twice, and placed it in Phillis's arms.

"Tak' it away," she said breathlessly. "I am na of thy blood. I canna keep up long. For God's sake tak' her out o' my sight before a' the strength's wrung out o' me. I gi' her up, I tell thee—I gi'—her up forIver."

And stricken dumb by the sight of the agony in the mother's face, almost before she could realize that her strange request had indeed been granted, she found herself out in the night holding the child in her arms!

* * * * *

It was not many days before the women at the Mills were gossiping among themselves concerning what little they knew of the story of Janet Ayres's child. Phillis Denham had taken it to "fetch up," as they put it, though how she had gained possession of it was a mystery. The two women came and went as usual, but there was no intercourse between them; each going her separate way when work was over, Janet to her desolate house, Phillis to her cottage and the child, who was cared for in her absence by a woman

whom she had taken into her house for the purpose. Since the night Phillis carried the child away in her arms, Janet had persistently avoided her. Evidently she had not meant to do the thing by halves when she said she gave the child up for ever. As to the little one herself, she had soon become accustomed to her new surroundings, though the novelty disturbed her at first. With Phillis she made friends in a way of her own—strangely enough, without a touch of baby effusiveness. They were the best of friends, but nothing nearer. Perhaps Phillis's way was not exactly the way to win a baby's heart—perhaps she was too calm and quiet, or perhaps some more subtle influence held her apart from this tiny creature; but, however that might be, she often felt a novel pang that she was held apart. At first she felt it but slightly, but as time went on, and the child crept into her inner heart, the feeling became stronger. How could the child fail to creep into her heart? She was a woman after all, and her slighted love for handsome Will Henders had been a very strong one. She had given up all for him: the friendship of her people, the affection of her friends—all she had possessed. She had looked

upon the great sorrow of her life as a just punishment for her defections, but, though she had cut herself off from this man whom she had so loved, she had never forgotten him for an hour—his physical beauty, his dashing ways, so unlike the ways of the grave young friends who had admired her, the shade of poetic romance in his admiration for her pure, high, self-contained style of beauty —she never forgot one attraction. And as this little creature played about the room in her quaint fashion, she fell into the habit of watching her with a curious feeling—almost a yearning. Nay, more than once it was a feeling so strong that it half angered her. The summer blue eyes mocked her with their haunting likeness to other eyes as warmly blue; lifting themselves to her quiet face, they stung her to the heart. They made her restless, less calm, less coldly content with her hard, unloved, unloving lot. She found old yearnings she had thought subdued coming back to her, conquered pains, long-struggled-against memories, and it may be that her secret suffering softened her.

Before the child had been with Phillis long, Janet Ayres was missing. She was absent from

her loom one morning, and a woman who was her neighbor said that she had shut up her house and gone away. That was all that was known by outsiders, but Phillis knew a little more. The night before the woman's disappearance there had come a light tap at her window, and going outside to see what the summons meant, she had found Janet Ayres standing as if waiting for her.

"Aw'm goin' away," she had said abruptly.

Phillis's heart beat somewhat more quickly. Had she repented of her decision, and come to claim the child?

"Why?" she asked.

The woman twisted a corner of her shawl around her finger, and hesitated.

"I ha' a reason," she answered, half doggedly. "An' it wunnot work no ill—it may work good; but that's neither heer nor theer. I come to speak to thee about—th' child."

"Thee are not—" faltered Phillis—"thee does not mean—"

Janet Ayres stopped her.

"I dunnot mean no harm, I tell yo," she said, "so I canna mean that. I am na goin' to hurt

it. I towd thee I'd gi'en it up furiver. I only want to know—to hear a word about it—I hanna heerd a word sin that neet. I want to know how its doin'."

"It is well," said Phillis, "and happy."

There was a moment's silence, in which the nervous hand dragged at the shawl. Then the wretched creature lifted, in half-ashamed fashion, her eyes to those of Phillis's.

"Has she—forgotten?" she faltered. And that moment the shawl was dropped, her hands went up to her face, and she burst into wild, yet almost silent, weeping.

"Dunnot tell me," she whispered, in the midst of her sobs. "Dunnot tell me; I know wi'out askin'. I dunnot see why I asked at a'. She were only a baby. Let me be a minnet."

So Phillis waited, a curious contest going on in her mind, as she watched the shaking, shrinking form. She had not forgiven this woman yet; but she was beginning vaguely to recognise the stained, bruised humanity, and thus to doubt her own stern, just self. What if she was wrong after all? What if she had refused what it was her duty to have given?

When the woman looked up again, she saw in the eyes of her enemy a troubled questioning.

"If thee would like to see the child," Phillis began.

The old doggedness returned to the face. "I did na come for that," was the answer. "I dare na enter; I dare na tempt mysen'. Happen' th' time 'll come—though I dunnot know——"

She stopped and took from the bundle slung upon her arm a little package, handing it to Phillis with that touch of awkward shamefacedness in her air.

"It's sumetin' as I made mysen'," she said, —"a dress and a few oddments. She—she'll niver know who made 'em, so they canna harm her if you'll let her wear 'em," ending in a choked voice. "There!" she said, suddenly, "that's a',—so I may as well be goin'. Good neet,—if tha'll tak' good neet fro' such as me." And she turned away.

Six months before Phillis Denham had spurned this lost woman; and now——How was it that this child had given them something in common—made them in some sense akin? A sudden impulse made her move forward and touch Janet Ayres with her hand lightly.

"I do not quite know what I owt to say to thee," she said. "I do not know why I feel that I have something to say, but if I have been wrong and—and hard, I ask thee to forgive me. I have needed pity; I need pity now. I will deal tenderly by thy child. Good-bye. God help thee; God help us both."

And so they had gone their separate ways.

* * * * *

Who at Grantley has forgotten the fire at Grantley Mills? Who will ever forget it who lived in the generation in which it occurred? *The* fire! they call it to this day, though there were fires before and have been since. "It was th' oil that did it," the old mill-hands say. "Yo see, when th' wenches oiled th' looms th' cans dripped, an' there it were. Th' floors soaked through an' through enow to set th' place afire,—an' the first spark did for it an' left no help. A' th' engines in Lanca'-shire could na' ha' saved it. An' so it went."

As for Phillis Denham, to the last hour of dim old age,—if such old age should come to her,—the fearful day would be her most vivid memory. She had come down to her work in the morning in a heavy mood. She had been disturbed the night before strangely, and she had not been able to

overcome her excitement. Sitting before the fire with the child in her arms, she had been startled by a sound at the window, and turning suddenly she had caught sight of a vanishing face—a face that had plainly been looking in upon her and her fire-lit room. The sight made her heart leap and then almost stand still. She could not force herself to believe it fancy, and yet when she had opened the door there had been no one in sight up or down the moon-lit street. This was not all. So strangely nervous and excitable was she, that in passing the office she had been startled again by the mere sight of a tall man standing at the desk, with his back towards her, because his figure had seemed familiar.

"Did tha see th' new overseer?" she heard a woman say, as she took her place; and her companion answered: "Aye, to be sure, an' a good lookin' chap he is, too."

It was not more than two hours after, that a girl at the loom next Phillis's looked up suddenly.

"What's that?" she said. "Th' bell ringin'?" And almost the next instant, with a paling face: "Th' engines stoppin'," she cried; "sumat's up, wenches."

They were at the top story of the huge building, and so the alarm did not reach them until the stopping of the looms, but a minute later a puff of smoke and a sound of hurrying feet and women's shrieks below told all the truth.

"It's fire!" shrieked the girl. "It's fire!" shrieked another and another, until voice upon voice took up the cry.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" And every desperate creature in the great room rushed towards the narrow stairway, with no thought but the hope of being first.

But the stairway was crowded already, and the heat and smoke were rolling upward, and beating back those who were at the front, while the rest were fighting on behind. If the fire had been above they would have been safer; but it roared below and crackled, and poured out thick smoke from the oil-soaked flooring, and so choked and blinded the mass of struggling creatures that they were panic-stricken. They fought, and strove, and shrieked, and prayed, until some fell under foot, and were trampled down, and some hung wedged in the midst, neither able to move one way or the other.

Phillis had been carried with the crowd. The first instinct of self-preservation had made her follow the rest to the door, and then she had seen the mistake they all made, when it was too late. She had no control over herself; the shrieking women bore her with them until they reached the next room, when she was crushed against the open door, and through it, and flung against a woman who had shared her fate. In the terror of the moment Phillis scarcely saw the woman's face, but the woman had seen her's, and caught at her with a horrible cry. It was Janet Ayres. Phillis, all bruised and shuddering, stared at her as if she had been a spirit.

"Thee!—Janet Ayres!" she said, just as she had done when they met upon the staircase.

The woman covered her face with her hands.

"I came last neet," she said, "an' this mornin' I come heer,—fur *this*."

There was no help for them,—no place for them among the writhing mass upon the stairway.

"We must wait," said Phillis. "It is certain death to try the stairway; it is on fire. They are mad with terror."

"It is certain death ony wheer," said Janet

Ayres. "Th' fire 'll be on us afore we can say a prayer."

But Phillis caught her by the hand.

"Come to the window," she said, "and let us cry to them in the yard. They must see or hear us."

The floor was hot under their feet, the smoke was suffocating and blinding them, but they made their way to the window, and flung themselves against it, beating the glass until the blood streamed from their hands. But they were only two women, and on the stairways there were hundreds shrieking with voices as loud as theirs, and in the yard the engines were rattling to and fro, and firemen were shouting, and men and women screaming to their children, who were crushed or burning within.

"They cannot hear our voices," cried Phillis; "and the smoke hides us."

They waited for a while, and then tried again and then again, and even again, and then there came a fearful crash, and such a burst of shrieks that women who were safe fainted, and men turned sick as death. The staircase had fallen, and with it its human burden.

Phillis sank down upon her knees, praying aloud. Her companion sprang at the window again like a wild animal, waving her arms frantically through the broken panes.

"We canna burn heer," she shrieked. "They mun see us.—Help, lads! Help, help!" And then to Phillis: "Shut th' door an' keep th' smoke out, or we shall choke." And when Phillis had obeyed her: "Come here, and help me t' mak' 'em hear."

And the terror in their voices made them so wild and shrill that it was not many minutes before they were heard, even in the midst of the roar of flames and voices. Some woman in the crowd heard them first, and, looking up, saw the waving hands.

"Eh, lads," she cried, "God help us!—thar's some wenches on t' third flight crying fur help, an' their hands is all cut to pieces wi' breakin' thro' th' winder-glass."

It drew the crowd to their side of the building in a minute's time—rushing round with new cries and wilder frenzy—shouting to the desperate imprisoned creatures at the window—yelling to the firemen and growing almost mad with excitement.

"Play on the room," they cried insanely. "Bring the ladders! That's Janet Ayres's voice! Aye, an' by God! that's th' Quaker wench's! Lasses, it's Phillis Denham an' Jenny Ayres. Whar's the new overseer?"

They called for the overseer, for from the first outbreak of the flames he had been the coolest and most active among them. He seemed to know what to do when every one else had lost presence of mind.

"We can't save the place," he had said, "let us save the lives," and he had worked amid fire and smoke almost like a man with a charmed life.

The news of the discovery flew to him at once, and the next minute he was forcing his way through the crowd—a tall fellow, with blue eyes and uncovered tawny hair.

"Stand back!" he shouted. "What is this about these women?—" And then his eye was caught by the frantic hands, and he broke off with an exclamation of horror.

"Bring those ladders," he cried—and then, to the crowd, "Who are they?"

"There's two o' 'em," he was answered by a

dozen voices, "a Quaker lass and Jennie Ayres—Jennie Ayres and Phillis Denham."

"Dunnot see as theer's much use o' tryin' th' ladders," said more than one man, doubtfully. "It's a main dangersome work. It canna be long afore th' walls crack in, an' then——"

"Henders," said one of the owners, who had just arrived, all in a hurry, "God knows it's a sickening, horrible thing, but—but it's a hard fate to face, and it is a bad look out. The walls may fall in, and——"

"Let them fall," he cried. "It's not my way to stand by and see women die. Good God, Phillis! to think it should be you."

And in spite of protestations and warnings, he had the ladders against the wall, and when they were ready he was ready too, a heavy hammer in his hand to break in the frames of the fastened windows. God knows what tumult rose in their breasts, when, looking down upon their deliverer, they beheld this man's face. Janet Ayres fell back with a groan, turning to the woman whose life she had blighted:

"Dost tha see?" she said.

Phillis answered with white lips.

"Aye! I see," she said, "I see," and hid her face.

There was a moment's pause, in which she heard the woman at her side panting as if for breath, and then Janet Ayres touched her sleeve, and when she looked at her she saw such deadly anguish in her face as made her start aside.

"See," said the unhappy creature, "see thee heer. Theer is na a moment—he will be heer—he canna tak' two—th' ladder will not bear it—and th' one as stays behind—." She broke off with a shudder. But she began again, "I mun be th' one as stays behind," she said. "He mun tak' thee."

"Nay," cried Phillis, a passionate pity and a passionate heroism rising within her. "Never that. God forgive me for the hard words I have spoken to thee; I will stay."

The woman, crouching on her knees, wrung her hands together. Was she tempted by an agonizing thought of her own sin, and the purity of this unstained creature whose soul was so much safer than her own.

"Theer is na a minnet," she said, "he is here

now," and so he was—beating in the window frame.

"It is thee he mun tak'—fur th' child's sake—I've gi'en her up. Happen it'll gi' me a chance—I dunnot know—but I want a chance—fur the child's sake. I've axed fur one in my way—an' happen this is it. He mun tak' thee."

And then the man was in the room, black with smoke, scorched with fire, almost blinded and staggering, but it was Phillis his blinded eyes saw—not her rival.

"Phillis," he cried, "Phillis—come with me. You can forgive me for a minute's time. I have come to save you."

But Phillis drew back.

"I forgive you," she said. "God forgive me that I have been so hard; but there is another—Janet Ayres."

Not a second's pause, but Janet Ayres rose up and confronted him, with misery in her eyes.

"Tak' th' woman tha loves best," she said.

"Phillis," he cried, "for God's sake."

"I will not go," she said, and slipped fainting upon the floor.

That moment Janet Ayres advanced towards her.

"Tha will go," she said. "Theer is na a moment, an' I will na gi' my life fur nowt. Tak' her in thy arms, Will Henders."

He had her in his arms already. He had her through the window upon the ladder, and the people were shrieking below.

Janet Ayres stood at the window looking down.

"I will come back," he shouted.

But she did not seem to hear him. She was saying over something—saying it with blanching lips and dilated eyes—saying it to herself in a whisper:

"Fur th' child's sake—fur th' child's sake."

He had thought he might return, but the watching crowd knew he would not. Fire and smoke pouring out at the windows fought against him on his dangerous downward way. Twice he nearly slipped. More than once his burden was almost too much for him, and the frail support he clung to tottered beneath his tread, and when he touched the ground the fire had reached the third floor room, and the ladder fell with a crash.

"Let me go back," he shrieked, when they tried to hold him, and he was man enough to mean what he said. But they held him fast, and one,

more thoughtful than the rest, forced him away with his back to the building.

The woman at the window stood still. The people below watched her breathlessly, or hid their faces in horror. The room grew hotter and hotter; there were rising tongues of flame here and there. The heat scorched her flesh, and she had to press close against the window for a breath. Oh, God! how safe they were below! Then there was a crash; the flooring shook.

"Fur th' child's sake," she cried, "Jenny! Happen this is the chance, Christ!—" and so went down into the abyss with her arms flung wildly upwards.

* * * * *

Phillis opened her eyes, and looked round. Her first glance fell upon her husband's face, and seeing it she looked no farther.

"Where is Janet Ayres?" she asked.

His awed face answered her.

"The Lord have mercy upon her," she said. "The Lord have mercy upon her," and closed her eyes again, her lips moving after her voice had dropped.

But Will Henders, despite his awe and pain,

was Will Henders still—he could not wait—he had something to say, so he bent over her, and touched her hands with impetuous tenderness.

"Phillis," he said, "Phillis."

The tears slipped from under her lashes and fell upon the pillow, but she did not speak, and at sight of these tears Henders turned pale and trembled.

"Phillis," he said, in a broken voice, "it shall be as you say—I will go or stay, as you decide; but I will say what I came to say before I go—if I must go. You were led astray with lies, Phillis—they told you lies. I was false to myself, but never to you. The only wrong I did you was in keeping that wretched story secret. I have been a villain, but not to you. I swear to you that this is true. God forgive me for my sin."

She opened her eyes.

"God forgive us both!" she cried, "Whose sin has been greater than mine? Why should I dare harden my heart against the world, when I was so full of wrong myself?"

He snatched at her hand, and knelt down, kissing it in the old appealing way she knew so well,

"You were too pure to understand—" he said.

"I was too hard," she said, "too cold and proud, and God has shown me when my little child died——"

"Your child?" he said. "My girl—my poor, poor girl!" and he drew her into his arms.

She did not try to move, but lay upon his breast.

"It died," she said, weeping, "perhaps through its mother's angry sin—it did not live a day."

He held her close, weeping himself as he caressed her.

"I have searched for you every hour of my life since I came home that day and found that you had gone," he said. "And at last it was Janet Ayres who made her way to the old place and told me where you were. She did not know that you had gone away believing a lie; she fancied your anger was all roused by hearing the truth; but something you had done for her had touched her heart. I knew now what that something was, and she told me that I could find you here. Phillis, must I go or stay?"

She clung to him, trembling all over.

"Take me home," she answered. "Let us take

her child, and try to make its life all its mother's might have been. She gave her life for mine—let me give mine to this little one. And if thou canst forgive me, Will, the time may come when I can forgive myself."

THE WOMAN WHO SAVED ME.

PART I.

THE medical man was holding my wrist and talking, and I was not listening. In the first place, I knew more about myself than he could tell me; in the second, I should scarcely have understood what he was saying if I had listened; and in the third, I was in so listless and indifferent a condition of mind that I did not care to listen—did not care to answer—did not even care to look, as I was half unconsciously looking at the dead brown leaves twisting in the eddying wind that whirled them down the street.

How dull it all looked! how dull the dragging days were! how I was beginning to hate the big, obtrusive stone houses, and dread the long gray patch of November sky showing itself over the roof, and alternately drifting leaden clouds and

drizzling leaden rain that made the wide flagged pavement wet and shining with the slop of passing feet! I had always disliked the English winter, but I had never lost spirit in any other winter as I had during this one. Three months of its slow, dull birth had added a hundred-fold to the listless misery which had become almost a part of myself, and more than once I had almost hoped that its ending would end my life. If during that wretched autumn I had hoped for anything, I had hoped for this, however vaguely; but the time had often been when I had been so utterly indifferent to life or death that I had not even cared to wish for either.

I was in one of the worst of these moods to-day, and when the doctor came it was at its strongest; so, as he talked to me, I scarcely listened, but looked out at the whirling leaves and dust in silence. But, though I was not listening, I could not help hearing his last words.

"And as I told Mr. Leith," he was saying, "I cannot be responsible for the result if you do not go."

I began to listen then, though I scarcely knew why.

"Go?" I repeated, "where am I to go, and why?"

"Anywhere," was his emphatic reply. "To the sea-side—to some country place—to Yarmouth—to Swansea—to Switzerland—anywhere away from London."

"But why?" I asked again, beginning to wonder if the man did not, after all, know something more than I had fancied.

"Because," looking at me steadily, "if you remain here you will die in two months, and Mr. Leith will blame me."

"Will he?" I muttered, half unconsciously—"would he blame anybody?"

Doctor Branaird looked at me again—keenly this time—but he said nothing.

"And I may go anywhere out of London?" I said, after a short pause.

"Anywhere," he answered—"though I should advise the sea-side."

"And you have spoken to my husband about it?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?" I asked this unwillingly.

"He said that he hoped the change would improve your health."

I looked out at the leaves in the street again. It was so like him. I knew what it meant. I must decide for myself. He did not care. I might live if I cared for life—die if I chose.

"I have a friend in Bamborough," I said after a while, "I will go there."

Dr Branaird rose and took his hat.

"Do," he advised—"Bamborough is just the place I should have chosen for you, had I not thought it best to let you choose for yourself. There is plenty of strong sea breeze on the Cornish coast, and your friend will improve the tone of your nervous system if she is anything of a woman."

So he left me, and so I turned to the street again and stared blankly at the dead leaves and the patch of gray November sky. But I could not watch it long. For the first time in many long months a certain quiet excitement crept upon me, brought about by the thoughts that drifted into my mind concerning my friend at Bamborough—concerning Lisbeth Grant.

We had been girls together, and we had loved each other. We had been to each other what girls seldom are—we had been faithful, though for

four years Lisbeth had been a wife, and though she was the mother of three children. I knew she was faithful to me still, notwithstanding that since her wedding-day we had never seen each other.

"My hands are full, Gervase," she had written to me once,—"and my heart is full, too—to the brim. Hugh and his children fill it as they fill the hands. They give me no time to stagnate. They keep the hands at work, and the heart at work too—loving, hoping, thinking for them—and I am sure the beating is more in time for the work the children bring. But they have not crowded you out, Gervase, you may be sure of that. There is all the more room, because they have made it larger. The children have made me love you more than ever."

"Yes," I said to myself as I got up from my chair—"yes, I will go to Lisbeth. If I am going to die, better die with Lisbeth than here."

I did not love my husband—I had never loved him, I told myself. It was not even love that had made us happy in the first months of our marriage. It had only been a weak mockery after all, and we had both learned the truth too late.

Even the little child that had scarcely drawn a breath could not soften our hearts towards each other. And, worse than this, out of my wretchedness had grown a shadow of sin and despair. I looked backwards sometimes to a fancy I had long left behind—to a fancy that I thought my husband had long blotted out, and looking backward so, I fell into a wonder at what now seemed my blindness. That man would have loved me; there would have come no bitter words from him,—that man would have been true to me through life and death; *his* love would never have died, burning out the more rapidly for the very strength of its first flame.

I did not often wait for my husband, but I waited for him that night. I wanted to tell him of my decision. Not that I fancied he would care for my absence or presence,—he was past that; we were both past it. Still I would show just so much grace as to make a pretence of consulting him.

"I am going to Bamborough," I said to him, "to visit Lisbeth Grant. Dr. Branaird advises me to do so." And I glanced at him carelessly.

He had just come in, and tossed his hat upon

a sofa in his careless fashion, and now he was standing upon the hearth looking silently into the fire. He did not raise his eyes.

"I hope you will find your health improved," he said.

"I hope so," I returned briefly.

But he was not quite easy, I could see, and I must confess to some slight surprise. The old black lines came out on his forehead, but they were not angry lines ; they were something new to me in their changed expression. He was so fidgety, too, and even more taciturn than usual. But I took no notice of the change until after we had supped, and he had been reading for half an hour, when he suddenly broke the silence by flinging his book upon the sofa after his hat, and speaking to me abruptly :

"You are not worse than usual," he said, "are you?" I did not look up this time, but went on working steadily. "I think not," I answered ; "I am sure not."

I would not tell him the truth. He should have had sight clear enough to discover it for himself.

He got up, and coming to the side of the hearth

upon which I was seated, caught hold of my netting silk, so stopping my work.

"That is not true," he said—"it is one of your fables."

"One of *my* fables?" I returned quietly.

He took hold of my hand and held it up so that my loose sleeve fell back from my arm.

"Yes," he said, "it is a fable. Look at your arm—look at your wrist, see how your bracelet fits it. It was as round as a baby's before"—and here, seeming to recollect himself, he let my hand drop.

I looked at it myself as I settled my sleeve again, and as I looked I smiled faintly. My beautiful arms had been my pride once, and now the heavy gold bracelet slipped loosely up and down over a white surface that was little more than delicate skin and slender bone. Perhaps, after all, Doctor Branaird was right—I had better leave London.

So the next day I went to Bamborough and Lisbeth. But early in the morning, as I stood before the mirror in my dressing-room, my husband came to me. I was surprised again, for of late there had been so little pretence at sentiment

between us that I had scarcely expected he would care to make any farewells. But I discovered in a very few moments that this was what he had come for, and I felt myself excited and nervous. This surprised me too. If we had loved each other, I might have understood the feeling; but since we did not love each other, what could it mean? He stood by my toilet-table, looking pale and agitated for a few minutes after his entrance, and then he broke the awkward silence:

"You will need money," he began.

I interrupted him.

"No," I said, "you mistake. I do not need any. Thank you."

"Very well," he answered, "if that is the case, I suppose it is useless to offer you any. But if you should require anything—wish anything—I hope you will write to me about it."

"Thank you again," I replied. "I will write to you once a week whether I wish anything or not."

He lingered a few minutes longer and then turned to go.

"Then, as I shall not see you again, I will bid

you good-bye," he said; "you will not return until ——"

"I recover or die," I interrupted. "If Bamborough agrees with me no better than London has done, Dr. Branaird says I shall die in two months; so good-bye."

I scarcely knew what feeling of desperation prompted me to make a speech so reckless, but it was a feeling desperate enough.

"Gervase!" he exclaimed.

I would not look at him, but in the mirror I saw reflected on his face a pallor as ashen as the pallor of death. Sometimes in after months I wished that I had looked at him more straightly.

But he said nothing more—only waited a moment, and then came to my side.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," I answered. And the next moment he had touched my cheek lightly with his lips and was gone.

It was late when I reached Bamborough, and the tide was coming in under a red, fog-obscured sun. I looked out of the carriage window as I drove from the station through the narrow streets,

and looking I saw little more than an immense expanse of sea, and a dry and wet brown beach where fishermen where lounging, fishermen's children shouting and playing, and fishermen's boats drawn up and fastened upon the sand with chains. I had always felt drawn towards the sea with a curious sense of fascination, and this evening the fresh salt air blew so coolly upon my cheeks that I had a quiet, half-defined feeling that I was not sorry I had come to Bamborough.

And at her open door Lisbeth stood ready to welcome me, and my first glance showed me the same handsome womanly face and handsome womanly figure, neither face nor figure a whit unfamiliar or a whit less perfect for the crown of comely matronhood. Two of her children clung to her flowing skirts, her handsome baby clasped her neck, and as she stood there smiling, I thought of Cordelia, and my heart warmed,—Lisbeth's strength and beauty always warmed it.

She caught me in the one arm her child left free, and drew me into the hall, pressing her warm red lips to mine.

"My dear!" she said, "my dearest!" and it seemed as though she had for the moment no

other words to utter. Her very voice warmed me and put life into my veins. I clung to her, enjoying her tender caresses, but scarcely speaking a word, for at least Lisbeth understood what my silence often meant and would not reproach me with it. She did not ask me any questions. It seemed that in an instant she comprehended everything, for she carried me to my room and took off my wrappings as if I had been a child and she my mother. I could not help noticing the mother touch in her strong, gentle hands, and the mother tone in her voice.

"I will show you my children as soon as you are rested," she said, "but you must rest first, Gervase. Your husband's telegram did not prepare me for seeing you look so changed."

I felt a sudden pulsation of the heart.

"My husband's telegram!" I said—"did he send one?"

"Yes," she answered, "very early this morning, to say that you were coming."

I answered not a word. Why had he done this? If we had loved each other, I should have known that it was because he could not brook the thought of my meeting even the momentary

chill of an unexpected reception; but now the news only startled me.

But though she spoke no word, Lisbeth's eyes lost nothing. I knew that she was searching me even when she spoke of other things, and I knew that she was searching me when, after she had called her children into the room, she stood near me in her royal mother pride, with her little one in her fair, strong arms.

"This is Hugh's boy," she said, touching the crumpled brown curls of her eldest. "Look up Lawrence. See, Gervase—Hugh's eyes."

They were magnificent children. Lisbeth's perfect, healthful nature had dowered them, and her unwarped, fearless soul shone out of their childish eyes. A desolate aching filled my breast as Lisbeth stood near me with them. Her life was so full—mine so empty. I had never loved children very much—had seen very little of them—and of my own baby I had seen nothing but the poor little cold body I had for one moment caught a glimpse of as Roger bent over it, shaken with a man's terrible weeping. I thought of this when I looked at Lisbeth's children, but no tears came into my eyes. I was wondering vaguely if

I were a wicked woman, and if my faded, empty life were my punishment. I do not think I had ever loved my baby, or wept for it—Roger had ceased to love me long before its birth, and I had learned to know what a mistake I had made.

But I lived again that day as I talked to Lisbeth. We sat by the fire after tea—she with her child on her breast, and I on a lounging chair near her, until the heavy fog had crept over the sands and up into the little town; hiding even the red lights. We had so much to say, and we were alone together for the first time since we had parted four years ago. Hugh was absent on business, and the children had gone to bed, so we went over the four years again—but until the close of the evening Lisbeth said nothing of my husband. At length, after a silence, she lifted her eyes from the fire and looked at me tenderly—searchingly—sadly.

"And you are happy, Gervase?" she said. I could not answer her at first, but after a silent struggle the words came. I could not tell a lie to Lisbeth.

"Happy! no, I am wretched."

She looked at me for a moment longer and then spoke again.

"Gervase," she said, "if your little child had lived—" I broke in upon her, losing all self-control in a wild, sudden passion of uncontrollable weeping.

"No—no!" I cried out. "Better as it is—far, far better as it is."

She moved her seat nearer to me and drew my head down upon her lap with that tender mother touch.

"Gervase," she said softly, "you think you do not love your husband."

How did she know? for she seemed to understand me in an instant. I cried out again in the midst of my passionate sobs.

"I have never loved him," I said—"he has never loved me. It was a mistake—it was all wrong from first to last, and he is wretched too."

It was all told then—the miserable secret that had grown to its full strength in my own heart alone. It was all told in one brief, rash speech—no, not quite all. The rest would be a secret for ever, even from Lisbeth.

But I had wept myself into calmness at last,

and we had been talking together again, though with longer silence between our words than there had been before, when in one of these silences I heard the front door open, and felt a great rioting rush of the boisterous sea wind, and there were sounds of a man's footsteps in the hall, and a man's voice flung out a scrap of song:—

> "I am come, its deeps are learned—
> Come, but there is naught to say:
> Married eyes with mine have met,
> Silence! Oh! I had my day,
> Margaret, Margaret?"

I was trembling from head to foot.

"The rush of night wind has made you shiver," Lisbeth said.

But I scarcely heard her.

"Who is it?" I asked breathlessly, though I knew so well—

"It is Hugh's cousin," was her answer. "I forgot to tell you. It is Ralph Gwynne."

PART II.

I had been nearly a month at Bamborough, and my health was improving slowly. As Dr. Branaird had prophesied, Lisbeth had strengthened my nerves. Her perfect health and spirits roused

me as nothing else would have done, and I found myself growing stronger from their force of example. It might be, too, that since I was relieved from my husband's presence a pressure was removed that had been too heavy for me. But, though I was so much better, I was creeping towards the goal of health very slowly, and it seemed that a breath of renewed pain would undo all.

"You do not gain color fast enough," Lisbeth said to me one morning. "You do not get enough of the sea-breeze. You must go out with Ralph again to-day, Gervase."

I had often been out with Ralph.

He looked up first at Lisbeth and then at me.

"I am entirely at Mrs. Leith's service," he said, "and I think you are right, Lisbeth; she needs more air." I got up and walked to the window, so that my back was turned to both of them, but Ralph Gwynne followed me and looked out over my shoulder.

Bamborough looked better than usual this morning. An adventurous ghost of sunshine was casting a clear bright light over the brown sands and gray waves, and over the huts and boats

and sturdy brown-legged children. It gave to Bamborough in November a pretence of fresh animation that three times as much sunshine could not have been able to give to London. So I carelessly remarked to Ralph Gwynne.

"Is it bright enough to tempt you out—with me?" he said in a low voice.

He knew I was not strong enough to refuse. He had not changed. He was the very Ralph Gywnne who had led me, years before, into a girlish romance that was like a dream of heaven, and had only ended when Fate separated us, and put between us and our untold love a whole world. But now it was different. There was more than a whole world between us; there was the past, the present, and the future. I at least had suffered since we bade each other an indefinite farewell—I at least could not love as I had once loved. Sometimes before the very thought of love my whole nature rose up and battled fiercely. At first I think that I was only indifferent; but in the end I fancied that this man understood me a little, and sorrowed a little over the woman's blunder I had made.

"Let us ask no questions of each other," he

had said to me once. "We have both suffered. Let us trust each other."

It was just what I needed. I should never have told him what I felt, but I was not sorry that one human soul understood the misery, the dragging days held for me. So this morning as we walked along the beach we were both silent. It was our custom to be oftener silent than inclined to speak. We both listened to the moan of the breakers and watched the long line of foam out at sea; and at last both by one accord stopped where a cluster of rocks sheltered us from the wind. I sat down, but Ralph Gwynne remained standing, with his back against a rock and his arms folded. At length he spoke to me.

"It is three years to-day," he said, "since you were married."

The sudden, hurried beating of my heart almost suffocated me. I had forgotten until this moment, and the rush of old memories overpowered me. I remembered the very day—just such a day as this, with sunshine warming even the leaden November sky, and whitening the piled edges of the clouds. I had thought it bright then. I remembered too how the day had closed in as I stood at the win-

dow of my new home with Roger's arms folded about me and his heart beating against mine. I could scarcely speak steadily, but I managed to do so at length.

"So long ?" I said coldly ; "yes, I believe you are right. Where were you ? How did you learn it ?"

He did not look at me ; his eyes were fixed steadily on the far-away white line of foam.

"I was in Calcutta," he answered. "The news had been a long time on its way and reached me on this very day—the day that was to be your wedding-day. I shall not forget it easily."

I dropped my glove, and as I stooped to pick it up a sudden recollection flashed across my brain. One day, three months after our marriage, Roger had come home with a budget of news from Calcutta, and among other things had referred to the intense heat and the prevalence of sunstroke among the foreign inhabitants.

"My informant is one of the travellers for Amboyse & Derig," he said, "and he tells me that the very day he left—the day we were married, Gervase—one of the salesmen was struck down with it. He was talking to one of our clerks who

had just arrived from England—talking about our wedding too, Hegblase says—and he saw the young fellow change color and stagger, and in a minute more he fell like a shot. Gwynne his name was, I believe—Ralph Gwynne."

So one man had suffered for me at least—one man's love had not died a natural death in a few brief months.

Ralph put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a letter.

"This was handed to me last night," he said. "It bears a London post-mark."

I did not offer to take it for a moment. I knew he had searched me to the core, that he had seen every fruitless pang and bitter humiliation of the past two years. My letters to my husband had been regularly sent, but his answers had been few and far between, and my pride had forced a fresh sting upon me even while I was otherwise indifferent to the neglect. So I hesitated now, and the next moment Ralph Gywnne came to my side as if drawn there by an uncontrollable impulse. A gleam of light shot over his dark face.

"You do not care to take it," he said. "The

very sight of it is a new torture. Let me throw it into the sea, Gervase."

His vehemence actually startled me into self-control. "That would be a new reading of old laws," I said. "No, give it to me."

He submitted without a word. But I did not read the letter. It had come too late for perusal, I said to myself. So I held it in my hand carelessly, making a show of an ease I could not feel.

It was in my hand when we returned, and I sat down before the fire in Lisbeth's room. The sea breeze had done me no good this morning. I was tired and worn out, and drooping into a chair before I removed my wrappings, sat silent, resting my chin upon my hand, and holding the letter loosely.

Lisbeth came in to find me sitting thus, and, at her first glance at me, I saw a strange shadow cross her face.

"Tired, Gervase?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered briefly.

She crossed the room to the fire and knelt down, on pretence of brightening the hearth a little with the brush she held in her hand. The

next minute she turned her fair, gracious face full upon me.

"And you have not read your husband's letter?" she said. "Why, Gervase?"

"Because I am not going to read it," I replied, and then, ruled by some sudden wretched impulse, I flung it into the fire.

But Lisbeth said nothing. I wondered at the time whether it was possible for her calm, healthful nature to comprehend the morbid misery that possessed me. I fancied not. The broad, even current of her life's affection had swept on undisturbed, bearing on its smooth surface many flowers. She could not understand me and my weak miseries and weaker regrets.

I hid my face in my hands when she left the room, and abandoned myself to thought. I could not explain why it was that during this month at Bamborough I had scarcely once thought of returning to London and my husband. If ever my mind had recurred to the thought, I had shrunk from it with a misery almost intense. I felt that I could not go back now unless, as I had hoped, in a coffin, shut out forever from his sight.

As I sat by the fire I was wondering vaguely

how he would meet me if treated thus—whether he would be touched for a moment with some remembrance of those first days of our marriage, when we had at least fancied we loved each other.

Two hot tears falling upon my hand startled me from my reverie just in time to hear Lisbeth coming down stairs with her child in her arms, and singing to it softly. Should we have loved each other better—Roger and I—if my baby had not died,—I asked myself with a pang.

Lisbeth came in and sat down near me again, still singing softly, still holding her baby upon her shoulder as she rocked her chair. O how I envied her her strength and happiness! She was so strong and happy; her handsome baby was so light a burden in her arms; her quietly busy ways so womanly gracious. I looked at her lovely, clear-browed face, and at the coronel of thick, light-brown braids across her stately head; I looked at her peaceful eyes, and the soft mouth that seemed made for children's kisses, and, remembering her girlhood, gave the palm to the beauty of her mother life.

Her calm, radiant face struck me to the heart's core. Often during the last year I had told myself

that I was only one of the many, that my mistake was only the mistake all women suffer from—the mistake of hoping for a happiness the world cannot hold. But Lisbeth broke down my theory.

I did not write to London again. The correspondence had only been a matter of courtesy at first, and a shadow of neglect could end it.

Ralph Gwynne did not go away, as Lisbeth had told me he intended doing. He had changed his mind, he said. Bamborough agreed with him, and the India house had prolonged his furlough in consideration of his past services and present ill-health. He did not look ill, I thought, and I told him so. But he stayed at Bamborough from day to day, and the longer he stayed the more strongly his old power reasserted itself. Not that I loved him. I was past that. Love could not come back to me, but I had loved him once with all the fervor of a girl's romance, and at least he loved me, and had not forgotten the past. One tithe of such love as he poured at my feet, in actions that were unspoken words, might have won me back to my husband and peace.

I did not repulse him. The listless wretched-

ness that ruled me would have prevented that, even if there had not been a faint fascination in the miserable aggrandizement of feeling that at least one man had been true to me, and was true to me yet. I used sometimes to wonder that Lisbeth never guessed at the truth. She rarely spoke to me of my husband—never of Ralph Gwynne—and yet I was always conscious of a restraining influence in her simple presence. A glance from her would check my recklessness. She held me back by a thread when nothing else on earth could have controlled me.

And so the days drifted by, and I strolled upon the sands with my old lover, and sat in the shelter of the rocks with him, and let him say what he would, scarcely listening, as I watched the waves and the incoming and outgoing boats and dipping sea-gulls.

After my husband's letters ceased coming I did not grow better, even slowly. I grew nervous and restless—even more nervous and restless than I had been in London. The old red spot came back upon each cheek, I did not sleep well, and when night came on I often spent hours at my window watching the driving clouds, and listening

to the chanting of the fishermen in the late-returning Bamborough boat.

I was sitting thus one night when I heard a low knock at my door, and opened it to find Lisbeth standing there, shawl-wrapped, and without a light.

"May I come in, Gervase?" she asked.

I opened the door wider that she might pass.

"Of course," I said; "you know that. What is it, Lisbeth?"

"It is nothing," she answered—"only that I heard you moving, and thought I would come and sit with you. Hugh is out."

We both went back to the window, and she knelt down in a girlish fashion of hers, resting an arm upon the window-ledge, and turning her fair face up to the night sky and the starlight.

"I hope you are wrapped up well, Gervase," she said after a while.

"I am quite warm enough, thank you."

"You must take care of yourself, you know," she said in her sweet, even voice, "for your husband's sake."

I smiled.

"For my husband's sake," I said, "yes."

"When he wrote to me last," she began, taking no notice of my words.

I started a little.

"When he wrote to you!" I exclaimed. "When did he write to you?"

"Yesterday," she said; "last week, the week before—every week since you have been here. He was afraid you would not speak quite freely of your wants, and he was anxious to hear all about your illness, and to be quite sure that no wish was left ungratified."

I leaned back in my chair and held to the cushioned arms for support. My breath was coming quickly and a sudden heat had flashed to my face. I could not understand this, but a strange feeling of joy took possession of me—though I told myself that I did not love this man and had never loved him.

"Your illness has been a great anxiety to him, Gervase," Lisbeth went on still, with her face turned upward in the twilight—"and it has troubled him more since you came here. He has felt your absence deeply."

I did not speak in answer, but I was weak woman enough to feel another thrill of mingled

pain and pleasure. Lost as the past irrevocably was, it had yet a strong power over me. As there never was a husband colder than mine, so there had never been a bridegroom more impassioned in affection; and, even in this winter of indifference, I could remember days in the dead summer when his untiring love had wakened me to a happiness almost divine, ephemeral as it had proved. Glancing at Lisbeth, the thought struck me that under her quiet speeches and quiet manner there lay a deeper thought for me than I had fancied, and then there flashed across my mind a remembrance of times when she had silently stood between me and the man who was my evil genius.

At this moment I recognized the man's power for evil over me as I had never done before, and a curious sense of repugnance came upon me with my recollection of something I had sometimes seen sleeping in his quiet persistence. I could not understand the influence that stung me to anger and roused my pride, but I never failed to succumb to it, nevertheless, and it invariably roused me to some fresh rashness of speech or action. But though I said little to Lisbeth, the pang of remembrance softened my heart, and

before she left me I had made up my mind to write a few words to my husband, at least; and when she was gone I drew my desk towards me and wrote them—only a few words.

"Your wife, Gervase."

I had not ended a letter thus for two years, and I hesitated a moment before I wrote the signature. But despite the lingering of pen over paper they were written at last, and as I looked at them I felt the warm blood beat into my cheeks, and my head drooped upon my clasped hands. Should I send them or not? I thought of Ralph Gwynne, and of what I had suffered, and my letter's fate was almost sealed. But even as I paused, a soft little cry from Lisbeth's room broke upon my ear. It was hushed the next moment, but the tiny voice had turned the scale.

I put the letter into its envelope, and sealed it with a new resolution. I would try to retrieve something of the past, at least. I would do no new wrong. I would cherish no bitterness against my dead child's father. If I could not be happy I would endeavor to be patient. It might not be for long—it could not be for long, I knew.

"I will give it to Ralph Gwynne to post in the

morning," I said aloud—"it will show him that ——"

I did not finish my sentence, because I dared not, even in the silence of my room. Even to the readers of this record I have not told all that my reckless misery drove me to. I could not justify my weakness, and otherwise had better be silent.

The sun was shining bright and warm into the breakfast-room when I went down with my letter in the morning, and the salt sea wind blew fresh through the open window up from the beach. As I had lain awake in the night a change seemed to have come over me, and under its influence I forgot the dull November days and pitiless November skies in this one rare chance of morning warmth and sunlight.

Ralph Gwynne was alone in the room, his stubborn persistency showing itself as it always did in his waiting for my coming.

I went to him at once, holding my letter in my hand.

"I have a letter here I am anxious shall reach London to-night," I said, looking straight into his face. "I thought I would give it into your

charge at once, as you generally go into Bamborough earlier than any once else. Will you post it for me ?"

He held out his hand and took it from me, slipping it into his vest pocket with scarcely a glance, but I knew that he had seen the superscription by the instantaneous change in his face. It was a very slight change, almost an imperceptible one in fact, but I saw it notwithstanding and caught its meaning.

" I envy your husband," he had said to me once —" I pity him—I hate him."

And just at the moment this abrupt, passionate speech, which was only one of many such, was embodied in the faint change that passed over his dark face, as he leaned upon the window ledge and looked out calmly enough at the fishermen working upon the beach.

He did not even refer to the letter in the commonplace conversation we drifted into. The momentary shadow left him so entirely that I found myself wondering if he had altogether forgotten it. But though he did not refer to the letter, before Lisbeth came in he spoke of my husband.

"I did not know," he said, after an interval of silence—"until yesterday I did not know that your husband had ever visited Bamborough."

The words were so unexpected that I glanced up quickly to see what they might signify, but to judge from his careless, averted face, they might have held no significance at all.

"I did not know," I said coldly, "that my husband had visited Bamborough at all. If he has been here I have been kept in ignorance of the fact."

"He has been here," he said indifferently, "often."

I did not make any reply. I knew well enough that he intended to force me to questioning him, but I was not in the mood to question, and so was silent. If my husband had been to Bamborough in secret, whatever his motive might be, he had hidden it from me, and the mystery was only a new thread in the web of his distrust, so it might pass. It was only a fresh sting, but I felt it at the time all the more deeply because of my last night's resolve and the three words with which I had ended my letter. I made no comment, I did not even speak of it to Lisbeth when she came. I

buried it in my own heart, as I was prone to bury my miseries.

When breakfast was over I wandered out on the beach alone. I did not often walk alone, but this morning even Lisbeth herself would have been unwelcome.

Down upon the sands where the rocks clustered together, and where the boats oftenest came up to the little cove, was my favorite resting-place, and there I took my seat as usual upon a large flat stone. The brawny fishermen knew me, and the bare-legged, shouting children knew me too, and, as I sat there, there were few who passed me without a good-natured greeting. I had amused myself with watching them often, but they did not amuse me now. I was dull and wretched again. It was a trivial thing to be wretched about, this slight concealment, which might have had no motive, but it had dampened my spirit and made me indifferent and miserable once more. The brown, bare-legged fishermen passed to and fro, mending their nets in the sun, and wading in and out of the water, but I scarcely saw them; the children shouted and chased each other like happy, uncouth young savages, but I did not

notice their play. I saw nothing but the sea and sky, and a boat whose tiny sail seemed growing larger as it neared the shore, until a shadow fell before me, and I glanced up half impatiently and saw Ralph Gwynne. He took a seat at my side, and then spoke to me carelessly.

"I thought I should find you here," he said.

"You did not go to Bamborough, then," was my cold comment.

"No," hesitatingly and slowly; "I thought I would see you first."

I looked out at the boat again absently; it was coming nearer to the land, and I felt a faint sort of interest in it, because I saw a woman at the prow, and the woman had a child thrown over her shoulder.

"Why?" I asked.

He did not answer me at first, but turned on his elbow and spoke to one of the net-mending fishermen who sat not far from us.

"Who is coming in, Gunnle?" he asked; "your women don't fish, do they?"

The man touched his hat good-naturedly.

"Some on 'em does," he said; "this un doent though, this un 'ats comin in. She's bin o'er to

Bambro' fur work. It's Janey—Janey an th' child, little Roger."

I moved impatiently, though I scarcely knew why. The boat was almost upon the beach, and the next minute the man who was in it jumped out and waded up, dragging it in by its chain with a great splash of the sea water, and then the woman turned her head, and as she got up I saw her distinctly. She was a handsome young creature, tall and straight and shapely, and very unlike the rest of the Bamborough women, with her long violet eyes, and thick curling red brown hair.

"Look at her, Gervase," Ralph Gwynne whispered, "and look at the child."

He had no need to tell me to do so, for I was looking at them both. There was a certain proud, steadfast sadness which attracted my attention in the girl's face, and I could not help noticing that she did not look at any of the bystanders when she replied to their friendly greetings. But as she passed the place where I sat my eye caught hers, perhaps because I had looked at her so steadily, and I observed that the instant she saw me a hot deep color ran up to her forehead, and she walked on hurriedly, holding her child more tightly.

As soon as she was gone Ralph Gwynne turned again to the old fisherman, and spoke to him just as he had spoken before.

"She's a handsome creature," he said, "and the child is handsome too. Who is her husband?"

The old fellow glanced up at me.

"Savin' the lady's presence," he said in a low voice, "she haint got none—Janey haint. We're all sorry for her here. There haint one of us but is sorry for Janey. She never was a bad 'un, but she was handsome an' unfortnit, and she's seen a sight o' trouble. She doent say much to none on us, because she doent like to face us, but she knows we feel friendly to'rds her, Janey does, and she knows we feel friendly to'rds little Roger."

"Roger?" I broke out abruptly, scarcely knowing what I said.

The old man looked up at me, rubbing his weather-beaten forehead as if I puzzled him by my vehemence.

"Yes'm," he said, "his name it's Roger Leith, and its named fur—"

I did not stop to hear the rest. For a moment the whole horrible truth flashed upon me, and I staggered to my feet blindly, clinging to Ralph

Gwynne, who had risen too. "Come away," I said; "take me away somewhere—farther down the beach—anywhere out of sight."

He did not speak to me, nor I to him, until he had half carried, half dragged me to the very rock shelter where we had sat the day he handed me my husband's letter, and there I dropped upon the sands, hiding my wretched face in my hands.

"Tell me the truth," I panted; "tell me—You knew this!"

He looked down at me with some vague pity in his eyes, and though I knew that he would have forged a lie to suit his purpose, I knew that this was no lie, and that he believed it even more steadfastly than I did.

"Yes," he answered, "I knew it."

"And came to prove it to me?"

"Yes."

I knew then what I had never known before. I knew that even in my misery I had mocked myself with a delusion. I knew that I had never loved this man, even as I fancied I did, through the contrast of his warmth with my husband's coldness; I knew that through all I had been

weaker than the weakest of women, for I had loved my husband, and I loved him still.

I broke into a low, wretched, hysterical laugh.

"You might have spared me this much," I said. "If my ignorance was not bliss, it was folly to be wiser than I was—to know more of my humiliation than I did."

"It would have been folly to let you add to the humiliation by relenting towards the man who has trampled you in the dust," he said passionately. "I swore that you should not send this letter—am I to keep my oath?"

I held out my hand for it.

"No!" I cried out sharply, "give it to me."

He handed it to me, and as I touched it the remembrance of what it contained, and how I had been duped, rushed upon me with the force of a whirlwind. I tore it into a hundred pieces, and scattered it on the sand.

"There," I said, "it is gone—for ever."

He came and bent over me, a little later, as I sat with my face buried in my hands, and he touched my shoulder, for I did not look up at him.

"And you will listen to me, Gervase!" he said.

I shook his hand off quickly, for his touch angered me—but I had made up my mind.

"Yes," I answered him, "I will listen."

* * * * *

I sat crouched before my window, feeling cold and sick and weak, but still with my mind full of my desperate resolve. I had written my farewell letter to my husband, and it lay upon the table. I had written my farewell letter to Lisbeth, and told her all, in the faint hope that Lisbeth would believe what no one else on earth would believe —in the faint hope that Lisbeth would believe my solemn word, when I told her that even at the worst I should not be so utterly lost as the world would deem me. I had laid my things all back into my trunks, even to the merest trifle. The very dress I wore was one I had myself purchased. I had not retained in my possession a single thing my husband had ever given to me—not even the sapphire ring that had been the pledge of our betrothal. And now that all my preparations were made, I was waiting at my opened window for the signal that was to come to me from the beach below. I had thrown myself adrift on the broad ocean of chance, and the waves might fling

me upon what shore they would, for the momentary passion of misery had settled into passive despair.

"When women lose all, as I am doing," I had said to Ralph Gwynne that night, "they generally have something at stake, some love or hope, but I have none; I had risked all I had to risk, and lost all I had to lose. You are clinging to a mad hope if you think to win me even in the course of time. I tell you I shall never love you. I will leave England with you, not because I love you, but because I love my husband and cannot bear to see his face again. I will be honest with you. I take all to give nothing. If you love me enough to help me, well and good; if not, leave me here and I will go out into the world alone."

And he had held to his purpose and agreed. Of course he did not believe me strong enough to battle against his stubborn persistence, and of course he was false in professing to be honest; but I knew my own steady strength of obstinate endurance, and he did not. And here, in the dim moonlight that streamed through the curtain of sea fog into my window, I was waiting for his signal, and Lisbeth was sleeping in the next room with her baby on her breast and her little children

near her. I thought of the abasement I had seen in the handsome girl-face a few hours before, and I thought of the child who had looked at me over his mother's shoulder in his fearless baby way.

"Roger's baby—Roger's!"

I hid my face in my hands, stifling the low cry that burst from me. I remembered the one moment, on the night of my baby's birth, when the delirious mists had cleared away from my brain, and I had seen my husband bending over the tiny form that lay upon the white pillow.

"If my baby had lived," I said aloud, "if my baby had lived, I might have been like Lisbeth."

I got up after this and walked across the floor and back again a dozen times. I was wondering what he would say when Lisbeth gave him the letter, and whether there would be a shadow of self-reproach in his memory of the past. I did not ask myself how my life was to be spent. I had a vague feeling that it could not last long, but I asked myself a hundred times how my husband would spend his. He would not mourn for me, I told myself, and some better woman might make him happy; but even in this my worst and most reckless mood, my heart cried out aloud at

the thought. I had ceased pacing the floor and gone back to the window again. I had even waited in the chill moonlight an hour when the signal came, and I rose with a fierce pulsation of the heart to obey its summons. I took up my shawl from the bed and folded it around me; I went to the table where my husband's letter lay, and I bent over and kissed it—my last farewell. I caught a glimpse of my face in the glass as I did so, and saw that there was a great hollow purple ring about my eyes, and a deathly pallor on my cheeks. I laid my husband's letter back and crossed the room to the door; as I laid my hand upon the key I heard a light footstep in the corridors, and as I turned the handle and stepped out I started backward with a low cry, for I stood face to face with—Lisbeth.

We looked at each other breathlessly for an instant in dead silence—I at her with a wild intense, unreasonable longing for some hope that might rescue me even at this late hour—she at me with nothing in her tender, dilated eyes but pity and wonder and love. Then she broke the strange stillness in a hurried, terrified voice.

"Gervase," she said, "Gervase, what does this mean?"

I met her gaze steadily. I do not think I was in my right senses.

"I am going away," I said, and my voice sounded strange and unnatural even to myself.

Another moment and she caught me in her arms as if I had been a child, and so drew me into the room and closed the door.

Her face was white as death. She was woman enough to read at a glance how matters stood, but her purely healthful nature could not at once comprehend a recklessness so desperate.

"What do you mean?" she demanded—"I cannot believe—where are you going?"

I answered her as steadily as before.

"I am going away," I said, "where I do not know—I do not even care. I am going away from England with Ralph Gwynne. I am going away with him that I may be lost to my husband for ever. You think I am a wicked woman, Lisbeth, and so I am, but God has laid his hand upon me, and I am under a curse."

She gazed at me as if she believed I had gone mad indeed.

"You are going away?" she cried out—"You! Gervase! Gervase!"

Nothing more; but the fullness of divine pity and passionate appeal in her voice, in her face, even in her clasped hands, overpowered me. I sank into a chair, holding to its arms to steady myself.

"Lisbeth," I said, feeling as though I had turned to ice, "I saw a woman upon the beach to-day—a woman with a little child in her arms—and the child's name is Roger Leith. You cannot save me, Lisbeth—let me go."

She caught me in her arms and held me. She thought that I was dying—I thought I was, myself, and it was only the sudden flush of comprehension in her face that helped me to retain my consciousness.

"Who told you that the child's name was Roger Leith?" she cried out—"Who could be so cruel as to lead you astray with that? My poor Gervase, tell me!"

I rested my face upon her bosom, panting for breath in the darkness.

"It is true," I gasped; "Ralph Gwynne was with me and he knew. One of the fishermen

upon the beach told us the child's name and its mother's history."

"Listen," she said, and her voice rang out like a command, "listen to me. Some one has told you a lie. *I* can tell you the girl's history—no one knows it better than I, Gervase, as no one knows better that the truth should prove to you the wrong you have done your husband. It was not through him that this girl was lost—it was through him that she was saved. He found her in London, wandering in the streets with her child in her arms, and he saved her from despair and death. He brought her here—back to her home—and helped her in her wretchedness so mercifully that she prayed from him upon her knees that her child might bear his name, since it could claim no other. He has guarded her ever since; he has saved two human souls—one for the sake of the little child who died, Gervase—his little child and yours."

In an instant it flashed upon me that I had not waited to hear the end of the fisherman's explanation. And he would doubtless have cleared away my misery with the next word, for they must all know the story, even the

roughest of them—the story of my husband's generous deed. And then the thought that I had not been deemed worthy to hear it struck me to the heart.

"I did not dream of this," I said; "how could I? he has told me nothing. He has never loved me even well enough to trust me so far."

"He has loved you always," Lisbeth said, "though you have both been wrong; he has loved you better than you have loved him, and he has been wretched through your distrust and coldness. It was his despair that made him seek me when he brought Janey to Bamborough. He knew that you had loved me, and so came to me for comfort and help. And you would go away—you, with the past all unredeemed, and your husband's love unsought,—you, with your little child's white soul to hold you to purity and faith! Gervase! Gervase!"

There was a moment's silence in which I crouched shuddering in my chair, my face buried in my hands! And then there came beneath the window the sound of a man's footsteps, and the sound of a man speaking in a low voice. His

words might have been an echo of Lisbeth's but that the one voice was the voice of the tempter, and the other the voice of the rescuer.

"Gervase! Gervase!"

It was Ralph Gwynne.

My strength was ebbing away fast. I could not have spoken to him if I would; but Lisbeth rose and went to the window, as calm in her womanly strength of purity as ever she had been in her calm woman's life.

"Ralph!" she said, her grave, pure-toned voice dropping upon the still night air like the voice of a spirit, "Ralph, Gervase is here—with *me*."

He did not reply, and not another word was uttered between them. She came back to me as his footsteps died away in the distance, and found me shivering from head to foot, yet burning with sudden fever.

"Better to have let me go, Lisbeth," I said weakly, "better to have let me go away and die, for I should have died, Lisbeth—I am dying now." And as she caught me in her arms again the dark room seemed to blaze up into sudden light and then fade out, and as the shadows

closed around me I felt that the end of life had come.

* * * * *

Weeks of interminable wanderings in some mysterious, barren land of misery,—weeks of interminable watching hideous panoramas that seemed to pass and repass and pass again,—weeks, nay, it appeared ages, of suffering through old wrongs, and loves and hates,—and weeks of waiting restlessly with frantic impatience for something which never came and never would come—for some stopping-place or shutting out of the crowding faces I did not know and was constantly scanning and striving to remember—weeks of such suffering, with now and then a blank or a dim sense of struggling consciousness, and then one day a long blank ended by my opening my eyes heavily, and dimly seeing Lisbeth bending over the bed upon which I lay.

I did not speak to her—I could not. My weakness was so great, my power over my languid limbs so utterly lost, that I gazed up at her without even trying to address her, only thinking half unconsciously of stories I had heard of people who had fallen into trances and retained the spirit of

life without the power of motion. Was I in such a trance? No, for Lisbeth was speaking to me and I could hear her quite distinctly, though I could not reply.

"You must not try to speak, Gervase," she was saying—"you must not try to think, even. You are getting better and you must sleep."

I heard her first words plainly enough, but as she ended her voice seemed to die away into the distance, and as my eyes drooped she was lost to me.

This was my first awakening after the night I had fallen into her arms, and after this first awakening there were no more of the interminable wanderings, though I seldom was strong enough to open my eyes. But as I lay there with my eyes shut I grew strong enough in a day or two to listen to the hushed voices of the people who were in my room, and in the end to distinguish them one from another. I heard Lisbeth's voice often, calm and low and sweet. I heard Hugh's softened until it was like a woman's. I heard a voice I knew to be the doctor's. I heard other voices strange to me, but first of all and before all I heard my husband's. I did not hear it once or

twice, or at stated intervals : day and night without an hour of absence. I felt Lisbeth's touch often : I felt Hugh's. I felt hands that were kindly and tender enough, but there was one hand that never touched me without drawing me farther from the grave and nearer to life, and this hand was my husband's.

And at length I found myself awake again, far into the night, and this time my eyes fell first upon my husband seated at my bedside, and when I made an effort to speak I found strength enough to utter a single word :

"Lisbeth."

He brought her to my side with a gesture, and as he turned towards the light his haggard face was a wonder to me ; but I had only power, when Lisbeth bent over me, to say to her one thing, in a whisper so weak that I scarcely could hear it myself.

"If I live," I said, "he must know. If—I die, it—cannot matter. Let him love—me—if he will."

The weak tears began to roll down my cheeks, and I could not stop their flow, and I saw that Lisbeth's tears were falling too.

"You will not die," she said ; "you will live to retrieve the past. He knows all—he read your letter. Roger, speak to her."

He laid his haggard face near mine upon the pillow, and the old glow of our bridal days was in his eyes.

"You shall not die," he said, "you cannot die —you are mine—I love you. I have followed you down to the valley of death, and brought you back, and I claim you, as God is merciful. I have loved you through all our misery, but I was not fit to understand your woman's heart. The blame was mine, not yours. God forgive me for the wrong I did your tenderness. You love me —yes, you love me. You must love me—you cannot help it. Do not try to speak. This shall be my first sacrifice, that I will deny myself the bliss of hearing your voice, since to speak might fatigue you. Do not try to speak, but if you love me and would give me hope, lay your hand upon my cheek."

Not a word of the wrong I had done, not a word of the misery I had wrought for him, not a word of distrust or reproach : I had come up from the grave, and the gates of Heaven seemed

opening to me. I tried to speak, but could not; for my soul was full and overflowing with the passion of a joy too divine for human words to express. But I found strength at last to move, and stirring a little in the very faintness of happiness, I laid my hand upon my husband's cheek, my head upon his arm, and so was clasped to his breast.

He loved me—he had loved me always, though he had tortured himself with the belief that my love for him had died. He was unlike most men as I was unlike most women ; he could not speak in common words of what lay so deeply locked in his heart. But, tortured as he was, he had hoped as I never hoped. He had come to Lisbeth for comfort because she loved me, and she had given it to him. Lisbeth knew what I did not know myself, that it was my distrust and love that was wearing my life away, and in her silent woman fashion she watched and restrained me when I was unconscious of her power.

I did not see Ralph Gwynne again until three happy years had passed, and, in passing, had made my life like Lisbeth's. Then, as I stood one night in the brightly-lighted hall of our home,

holding my child in my strong arms, as I greeted my husband a man passed by upon the pavement and looked in at me. As the light from the hall lamp fell upon his face I saw it was Ralph Gwynne, and that he knew me.

"*SURLY TIM'S TROUBLE.*"

A LANCASHIRE STORY.

"SORRY to hear my fellow-workmen speak so disparagin' o' me? Well, Mester, that's as it may be, yo know. Happen my fellow-workmen ha made a bit o' a mistake—happen what seems loike crustiness to them beant so much crustiness as summut else—happen I mought do my bit o' complainin' too. Yo munnot trust aw yo hear, Mester; that's aw I can say."

I looked at the man's bent face quite curiously, and, judging from its rather heavy but still not unprepossessing outline, I could not really call it a bad face, or even a sulky one. And yet both managers and hands had given me a bad account of Tim Hibblethwaite. "Surly Tim" they called him, and each had something to say about his sullen disposition to silence, and his short answers. Not that he was accused of anything like misde-

meanor, but he was "glum loike," the factory people said, and "a surly fellow well deserving his name," as the master of his room had told me.

I had come to Lancashire to take the control of my father's spinning factory a short time before, and, being anxious to do my best toward the hands, I often talked to one and another in a friendly way, so that I could the better understand their grievances and remedy them with justice to all parties concerned. So, in conversing with men, women, and children, I gradually found out that Tim Hibblethwaite was in bad odor, and that he held himself doggedly aloof from all; and this was how, in the course of time, I came to speak to him about the matter, and the opening words of my story are the words of his answer. But they did not satisfy me by any means. I wanted to do the man justice myself, and see that justice was done to him by others; and then again when, after my curious look at him, he lifted his head from his work and drew the back of his hand across his warm face, I noticed that he gave his eyes a brush, and, glancing at him once more, I recognized the presence of a queer moisture in them.

In my anxiety to conceal that I had noticed anything unusual, I am afraid I spoke to him quite hurriedly. I was a young man then, and by no means as self-possessed as I ought to have been.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Hibblethwaite," I said; "I don't mean to complain—indeed, I have nothing to complain of, for Foxley tells me you are the steadiest and most orderly hand he has under him; but the fact is I should like to make friends with you all, and see that no one is treated badly. And somehow or other I found out that you were not disposed to feel friendly towards the rest, and I was sorry for it. But I suppose you have some reason of your own."

The man bent down over his work again, silent for a minute, to my discomfiture, but at last he spoke, almost huskily.

"Thank yo, Mester," he said; "yo're a koindly chap or yo wouldn't ha noticed. An' yo're not fur wrong either. I ha reasons o' my own, tho' I'm loike to keep 'em to mysen most o' toimes. Th' fellows as throws their slurs on me would na understand 'em if I were loike to gab,

which I never were. But happen th' toime 'll come when Surly Tim 'll tell his own tale, though I often think its loike it wunnot come till th' Day o' Judgment.

"I hope it will come before then," I said, cheerfully. "I hope the time is not far away when we shall all understand you, Hibblethwaite. I think it has been misunderstanding so far which has separated you from the rest, and it cannot last always, you know."

But he shook his head—not after a surly fashion, but, as I thought, a trifle sadly or heavily—so I did not ask any more questions, or try to force the subject upon him.

But I noticed him pretty closely as time went on, and the more I saw of him the more fully I was convinced that he was not so surly as people imagined. He never interfered with the most active of his enemies, or made any reply when they taunted him, and more than once I saw him perform a silent, half-secret act of kindness. Once I caught him throwing half his dinner to a wretched little lad who had just come to the factory, and worked near him ; and once again, as I was leaving the building on a rainy night, I

came upon him on the stone steps at the door bending down with an almost pathetic clumsiness to pin the woollen shawl of a poor little mite who, like so many others, worked with her shiftless father and mother to add to their weekly earnings. It was always the poorest and least cared for of the children whom he seemed to befriend, and very often I noticed that even when he was kindest, in his awkward man fashion, the little waifs were afraid of him, and showed their fear plainly.

The factory was situated on the outskirts of a thriving country town near Manchester, and at the end of the lane that led from it to the more thickly populated part there was a path crossing a field to the pretty church and church-yard, and this path was a short cut homeward for me. Being so pretty and quiet, the place had a sort of attraction for me, and I was in the habit of frequently passing through it on my way, partly because it was pretty and quiet, perhaps, and partly, I have no doubt, because I was inclined to be weak and melancholy at the time, my health being broken down under hard study.

It so happened that in passing here one night,

and glancing in among the graves and marble monuments as usual, I caught sight of a dark figure sitting upon a little mound under a tree and resting its head upon its hands, and in this sad-looking figure I recognized the muscular outline of my friend Surly Tim.

He did not see me at first, and I was almost inclined to think it best to leave him alone; but as I half turned away he stirred with something like a faint moan, and then lifted his head and saw me standing in the bright, clear moonlight.

"Who's theer?" he said. "Dost ta want owt?"

"It is only Doncaster, Hibblethwaite," I returned, as I sprang over the low stone wall to join him. "What is the matter, old fellow? I thought I heard you groan just now."

"Yo mought ha done, Mester," he answered heavily. "Happen tha did. I dunnot know mysen. Nowts th' matter though, as I knows on, on'y I'm a bit out o' soarts."

He turned his head aside slightly and began to pull at the blades of grass on the mound, and all at once I saw that his hand was trembling nervously.

It was almost three minutes before he spoke again.

"That un belongs to me," he said suddenly at last, pointing to a longer mound at his feet. "An' this little un," signifying with an indescribable gesture the small one upon which he sat.

"Poor fellow," I said, "I see now."

"A little lad o' mine," he said slowly and tremulously. "A little lad o' mine an'—an' his mother."

"What!" I exclaimed, "I never knew that you were a married man, Tim."

He dropped his head upon his hand again, still pulling nervously at the grass with the other.

"Th' law says I beant, Mester," he answered in a painful strained fashion. "I canna tell mysen what God-a'-moighty 'ud say about it."

"I don't understand," I faltered; "you don't mean to say the poor girl never was your wife, Hibblethwaite."

"That's what th' law says," slowly; "I thowt different mysen, an' so did th' poor lass. That's what's the matter, Mester: that's th' trouble."

The other nervous hand went up to his bent face for a minute and hid it, but I did not speak.

There was so much of strange grief in his simple movement that I felt words would be out of place. It was not my dogged inexplicable " hand" who was sitting before me in the bright moonlight on the baby's grave; it was a man with a hidden history of some tragic sorrow long kept secret in his homely breast—perhaps a history very few of us could read aright. I would not question him, though I fancied he meant to explain himself. I knew that if he was willing to tell me the truth it was best that he should choose his own time for it, and so I left him alone.

And before I had waited very long he broke the silence himself, as I had thought he would.

* * * * *

" It wor welly about six year ago I cum 'n here," he said, " more or less, welly about six year. I wor a quiet chap then, Mester, an' had na many friends, but I had more than I ha' now. Happen I wor better nater'd, but just as loike I were loighter hearted—but that's nowt to do wi' it.

" I had na been here more than a week when theer comes a young woman to moind a loom i' th' next room to me, an' this young woman bein'

pretty an' modest takes my fancy. She wor na loike th' rest o' the wenches—loud talkin' an' slattern i' her ways, she wor just quiet loike and nowt else. First time I seed her I says to mysen, 'Theer's a lass 'at's seed trouble;' an' somehow every toime I seed her afterward I says to mysen, 'Theer's a lass 'at's seed trouble.' It wur in her eye—she had a soft loike brown eye, Mester—an' it wur in her voice—her voice wur soft loike, too —I sometimes thowt it were plain to be seed even i' her dress. If she'd been born a lady she'd ha' been one o' th' foine soart, an' as she'd been born a factory-lass she wur one o' th' foine soart still. So I took to watchin' her an' tryin' to mak' friends wi' her, but I never had much luck wi' her till one neet I was goin' home through th' snow, and I seed her afore fighten' th' drift wi' nowt but a thin shawl over her head; so I goes up behind her an' I says to her, steady and respectful, so as she wouldna be feart, I says:—

" 'Lass, let me see thee home. It's bad weather fur thee to be out in by thysen. Tak' my coat an' wrop thee up in it, an' tak' hold o' my arm an' let me help thee along.'

" She looks up right straight forrad i' my face

wi' her brown eyes, an' I tell yo, Mester, I wur glad I wur an honest man 'stead o' a rascal, fur them quiet eyes 'ud ha fun me out before I'd ha' done sayin' my say if I'd meant harm.

"'Thaank yo kindly, Mester Hibblethwaite,' she says, 'but dunnot tak' off th' coat fur me; I'm doin' pretty nicely. It is Mester Hibblethwaite, beant it?'

"'Aye, lass,' I answers, 'it's him. Mought I ax yo're name?'

"'Aye, to be sure,' said she. 'My name's Rosanna—'Sanna Brent th' folk at th' mill allus ca's me. I work at th' loom i' th' next room to thine. I've seed thee often an' often.'

"So we walks home to her lodgings, an' on th' way we talks together friendly an' quiet loike, an' th' more we talks th' more I sees she's had trouble, an' by an' by—bein' ony common workin' folk, we're straightforrad to each other in our plain way—it comes out what her trouble has been.

"'Yo p'raps wouldn't think I've been a married woman, Mester,' she says; "but I ha', an' I wedded an' rued. I married a sojer when I wur a giddy young wench four years ago, an' it wur

th' worst thing as ever I did i' aw my days. He wur one o' yo're handsome fastish chaps, an' he tired o' me as men o' his stripe allers do tire o' poor lasses, an' then he ill-treated me. He went to th' Crimea after we'n been wed a year, an' left me to shift fur mysen. An' I heard six month after he wur dead. He'd never writ back to me nor sent me no help, but I couldna' think he wur dead till th' letter comn. He wur killed th' first month he wur out fightin' th' Rooshians. Poor fellow! Poor Phil! Th' Lord ha' mercy on him!'

"That wur how I found out about her trouble, an' somehow it seemed to draw me to her, an' make me feel kindly to'ards her. 'T wur so pitiful to hear her talk about th' rascal, so sorrowful an' gentle, an' not gi' him a real hard word fur a' he'd done. But that's allers th' way wi' women folk—th' more yo harry's them, th' more they'll pity yo an' pray fur yo. Why she wurna more than twenty-two then, an' she must ha' been nowt but a slip o' a lass when they wur wed.

"Hows'ever, Rosanna Brent an' me got to be good friends, an' we walked home together o' nights, an' talked about our bits o' wage, an' our

bits o' debt, an' th' way that wench 'ud keep me up i' spirits when I wur a bit down-hearted about owt wur just a wonder. She wur so quiet an' steady, an' when she said owt she meant it, an' she never said too much or too little. Her brown eyes allers minded me o' my mother, though th' old woman deed when I wur nobbut a little chap, but I never seed 'Sanna Brent smile 'bout thinkin' o' how my mother looked when I wur kneelin' down sayin' my prayers after her. An' bein' as th' lass wur so dear to me, I made up my mind to ax her to be summat dearer. So once goin' home along wi' her, I takes hold o' her hand an' lifts it up an' kisses it gentle—as gentle an' wi' summat th' same feelin' as I'd kiss th' Good Book.

" ' 'Sanna,' I says ; ' bein' as yo've had so much trouble wi' yo're first chance, would yo' be afeard to try a second ? Could yo' trust a mon again ? Such a mon as me, 'Sanna ?'

" ' I wouldna be feart to trust thee, Tim,' she answers back, soft an' gentle after a manner. ' I wouldna be feart to trust thee any time.'

" I kisses her hand again, gentler still.

" ' God bless thee, lass,' I says. ' Does that mean yes ?'

" She crept up closer to me i' her sweet, quiet way.

" 'Aye, lad,' she answers. 'It means yes, an' I'll bide by it.'

" An' tha shalt never rue it, lass,' said I. 'Tha's gi'en thy life to me, an' I'll gi' mine to thee, sure and true.'

" So we wur axed i' th' church t' next Sunday, an' a month fra then we were wed, an' if ever God's sun shone on a happy mon, it shone on one that day, when we come out o' church together—me and Rosanna—an' went to our bit o' a home to begin life again. I couldna tell thee, Mester—theer beant no words to tell how happy an' peaceful we lived fur two year after that. My lass never altered her sweet ways, an' I just loved her to make up to her fur what had gone by. I thanked God-a'-moighty fur his blessing every day, an' every day I prayed to be made worthy of it. An' here's just wheer I'd like to ax a question, Mester, about summat 'ats worretted me a good deal. I dunnot want to question th' Maker, but I would loike to know how it is 'at sometime it seems 'at we're clean forgot—as if He couldna fash hissen about our troubles, an' most loike left 'em to work out theirsens. Yo see, Mester, an' we aw see

sometime he thinks on us an' gi's us a lift, but hasna tha thysen seen times when tha stopt short an' axed thysen, 'Wheer's God-a'-moighty 'at he isna straighten things out a bit? Th' world's i' a power o' a snarl. Th' righteous is forsaken 'n his seed's beggin' bread. An' th' devil's topmost again.' I've talked to my lass about it sometimes, an' I dunnot think I meant harm, Mester, for I felt humble enough—an' when I talked, my lass she'd listen an' smile soft an' sorrowful, but she never gi' me but one answer.

"'Tim,' she'd say, 'this is on'y th' skoo' an' we're th' scholars, an' He's teachin' us His way. We munnot be loike th' children o' Israel i' th' Wilderness, an' turn away fra th' cross 'cause o' th' Sarpent. We munnot say, "Theer's a snake:" we mun say, "Theer's th' Cross, an' th' Lord gi' it to us." Th' teacher wouldna be o' much use, Tim, if th' scholars knew as much as he did, an' I allers think it's th' best to comfort mysen wi' sayin', Th' Lord-a'-moighty, he knows.'

"An' she allers comforted me too when I wur worretted. Life looked smooth somehow them three year. Happen th' Lord sent 'em to me to make up fur what wur comin'.

"At th' eend o' th' first year th' child wur born, th' little lad here," touching the turf with his hand, "'Wee Wattie' his mother ca'd him, an' he wur a fine lightsome little chap. He filled th' whole house wi' music day in an' day out, crowin' an' crowin'—an' cryin' too sometime. But if ever yo're a feyther, Mester, yo'll find out 'at a baby's cry 's music often enough, an' yo'll find, too, if yo ever lose one, 'at yo'd give all yo'd getten just to hear even th' worst o' cryin'. Rosanna she couldna find i' her heart to set th' little 'un out o' her arms a minnit, an' she'd go about th' room wi' her eyes aw leeted up, an' her face bloomin' like a slip o' a girl's, an' if she laid him i' th' cradle her head 'ud be turnt o'er her shoulder aw' th' time lookin' at him an' singin' bits o' sweet-soundin' foolish woman-folk's songs. I thowt then 'at them old nursery songs wur th' happiest music I ever heard, an' when 'Sanna sung 'em they minded me o' hymn tunes.

"Well, Mester, before th' spring wur out Wee Wat was toddlin' round holdin' to his mother's gown, an' by th' middle o' th' next he was cooin' like a dove, an' prattlin' words i' a voice like hers. His eyes wur big an' brown an' straightforrard

like hers, an' his mouth was like hers, an' his curls wur the color o' a brown bee's back. Happen we set too much store by him, or happen it wur on'y th' Teacher again teachin' us his way, but how'sever that wur, I came home one sunny mornin' fro' th' factory, an' my dear lass met me at th' door, all white an' cold, but tryin' hard to be brave an' help me to bear what she had to tell.

"'Tim,' said she, 'th' Lord ha' sent us a trouble; but we can bear it together, canna we, dear lad?'

"That wor aw, but I knew what it meant, though t' poor little lamb had been well enough when I kissed him last.

"I went in an' saw him lyin' theer on his pillows strugglin' an' gaspin' in hard convulsions, an' I seed aw' was over. An' in half an hour, just as th' sun crept across th' room an' touched his curls, th' pretty little chap opens his eyes aw at once.

"'Daddy!' he crows out. 'Sithee Dad—!' an' he lifts hissen up, catches at th' floatin' sunshine, laughs at it, and fa's back—dead, Mester.

"I've allers thowt 'at th' Lord-a'-moighty knew what he wur doin' when he gi' th' woman t'

Adam i' th' Garden o' Eden. He knowed he wor nowt but a poor chap as couldna do fur hissen ; an' I suppose that's th' reason he gi' the woman th' strength to bear trouble when it comn. I'd ha' gi'en clean in if it hadna been fur my lass when th' little chap deed. I never tackledt owt i' aw my days 'at hurt me as heavy as losin' him did. I couldna abear th' sight o' his cradle, an' if ever I comn across any o' his bits o' playthings, I'd fall to cryin' an' shakin' like a babby. I kept out o' th' way o' th' neebors' children even. I wasna like Rosanna. I couldna see quoite clear what th' Lord meant, an' I couldna help murmuring sad and heavy. That's just loike us men, Mester ; just as if th' dear wench as had give him her life fur food day an' neet, hadna fur th' best reet o' th' two to be weak an' heavy-hearted.

"But I getten welly over it at last, an' we was beginnin' to come round a bit an' look forrad to th' toime we'd see him agen 'stead o' lookin' back to th' toime we shut th' round bit of a face under th' coffin lid. Day comn when we could bear to talk about him an' moind things he'd said an' tried to say i' his broken babby way. An' so we were creepin' back again to th' old happy quiet, an' we

had been for welly six month, when summat fresh come. I'll never forget it, Mester, th' neet it happened. I'd kissed Rosanna at th' door an' left her standin' theer when I went up to th' village to buy summat she wanted. It wur a bright moonlight neet, just such a neet as this, an' th' lass had followed me out to see th' moonshine, it wur so bright an' clear ; an' just before I starts she folds both her hands on my shoulder an' says, soft an' thoughtful :—

"'Tim, I wonder if th' little chap sees us ?"

"'I'd loike to know, dear lass,' I answers back. An' then she speaks again :—

"'Tim, I wonder if he'd know he was ours if he could see, or if he'd ha' forgot ? He wur such a little fellow."

"Them wur th' last peaceful words I ever heerd her speak. I went up to th' village an' getten what she sent me fur, an' then I comn back. Th' moon wur shinin' as bright as ever, an' th' flowers i' her slip o' a garden wur aw sparklin' wi' dew. I seed 'em as I went up th' walk, an' I thowt again of what she'd said bout th' little lad.

"She wasna outside, an' I couldna see a leet

about th' house, but I heerd voices, so I walked straight in—into th' entry, an' into th' kitchen, an' theer she wur, Mester—my poor wench, crouchin' down by th' table, hidin' her face i' her hands, an' close beside her wur a mon—a mon i' red sojer clothes.

"My heart leaped into my throat, an' fur a minnit I hadna a word, for I saw summat wur up, though I couldna tell what it wur. But at last my voice came back.

"'Good evenin', Mester,' I says to him; 'I hope yo ha'not broughten ill-news? What ails thee, dear lass?'

"She stirs a little, an' gives a moan like a dyin' child; an' then she lifts up her wan, broken-hearted face, an' stretches out both her hands to me.

"'Tim,' she says, 'dunnot hate me, lad, dunnot. I thowt he were dead long sin'. I thowt 'at th' Rooshans killed him an' I wur free, but I amna. I never wur. He never deed, Tim, an' theer he is—the mon as I wur wed to an' left by. God forgi' him, an' oh God, forgi' me!'

"Theer, Mester, there's a story fur thee. What dost ta' think o't? My poor lass wasna my wife

at aw—th' little chap's mother wasna his feyther's wife, an' never had been. That theer worthless fellow as beat an' starved her an' left her to fight th' world alone, had comn back alive an' well, ready to begin again. He could tak' her away fro' me any hour i' th' day, an' I couldna say a word to bar him. Th' law said my wife—th' little dead lad's mother—belonged to him, body an' soul. Theer was no law to help us—it wur aw on his side.

"Theer's no use o' goin' o'er aw we said to each other i' that dark room theer. I raved an' prayed an' pled wi' th' lass to let me carry her across th' seas, wheer I'd heerd tell theer was help fur such loike ; but she pled back i' her broken patient way that it wouldna be reet, an' happen it wur th' Lord's will. She didna say much to th' sojer. I scarce heard her speak to him more than once, when she axed him to let her go away by hersen.

"'Tha canna want me now, Phil,' she said. 'Tha canna care fur me. Tha must know I'm more this mon's wife than thine. But I dunnot ax thee to gi' me to him because I know that wouldna be reet ; I on'y ax thee to let me

aloan. I'll go fur enough off an' never see him more.'

"But th' villain held to her. If she didna come wi' him, he said, he'd ha' me up before th' court fur bigamy. I could ha' done murder then, Mester, an' I would ha' done if it hadna been fur th' poor lass runnin' in betwixt us an' pleadin' wi' aw her might. If we'n been rich foak theer might ha' been some help fur her, at least; th' law might ha' been browt to mak' him leave her be, but bein' poor workin' foak theer was ony one thing: th' wife mun go wi' th' husband, an' theer th' husband stood—a scoundrel, cursing, wi' his black heart on his tongue.

"'Well,' says th' lass at last, fair wearied out wi' grief, 'I'll go wi' thee, Phil, an' I'll do my best to please thee, but I wunnot promise to forget th' mon as has been true to me, an' has stood betwixt me an' th' world.'

"Then she turned round to me.

"'Tim,' she said to me, as if she wur haaf feart —aye, feart o' him, an' me standin' by. Three hours afore, th' law 'ud ha' let me mill any mon at feart her. 'Tim,' she says, 'surely he wunnot refuse to let us go together to th' little lad's grave

fur th' last time.' She didna speak to him but to me, an' she spoke still an' strained as if she wur too heart-broke to be wild. Her face was as white as th' dead, but she didna cry, as any other woman would ha' done. 'Come, Tim,' she said, 'he canna say no to that.'

"An' so out we went, 'thout another word, an' left th' black-hearted rascal behind, sittin' i' th' very room t' little 'un deed in. His cradle stood theer i' th' corner. We went out into th' moonlight 'thout speakin', an' we didna say a word until we come to this very place, Mester.

"We stood here for a minute silent, an' then I sees her begin to shake, an' she throws hersen down on th' grass wi' her arms flung o'er th' grave, an' she cries out as ef her death-wound had been give to her.

"'Little lad,' she says, 'little lad, dost ta see thee mother? Canst na tha hear her callin' thee? Little lad, get nigh to th' Throne an' plead!'

"I fell down beside o' th' poor crushed wench an' sobbed wi' her. I couldna comfort her, fur wheer wur there any comfort for us? Theer wur none left—theer wur no hope. We was shamed an' broke down—our lives was lost. Th' past wur

nowt—th' future wur worse. Oh, my poor lass, how hard she tried to pray—fur me, Mester—yes, fur me, as she lay theer wi' her arms round her dead babby's grave, an' her cheek on th' grass as grew o'er his breast. 'Lord God-a'-moighty,' she says, 'help us—dunnot gi' us up—dunnot, dunnot. We canna do 'thowt thee now, if th' time ever wur when we could. Th' little chap mun be wi' Thee, I moind th' bit o' comfort about getherin' th' lambs i' His bosom. An', Lord, if Tha could spare him a minnit, send him down to us wi' a bit o' leet. Oh, Feyther! help th' poor lad heer—help him. Let th' weight fa' on me, not on him. Just help th' poor lad to bear it. If ever I did owt as wur worthy i' Thy sight, let that be my reward. Dear Lord-a'-moighty, I'd be willin' to gi' up a bit o' my own heavenly glory fur th' dear lad's sake.'

"Well, Mester, she lay theer on t' grass prayin' an' cryin', wild but gentle, fur nigh haaf an hour, an' then it seemed 'at she got quoite loike, an' she got up. Happen th' Lord had hearkened an' sent th' child—happen He had, fur when she getten up her face looked to me aw white an' shining i' th' clear moonlight.

"'Sit down by me, dear lad,' she said, 'an' hold my hand a minnit.' I set down an' took hold of her hand as she bid me.

"'Tim,' she said, 'this wur why th' little chap deed. Dost na tha see now 'at th' Lord knew best?'

"'Yes, lass,' I answers humble, an' lays my face on her hand, breakin' down again.

"'Hush, dear lad,' she whispers, 'we hannot time fur that. I want to talk to thee. Wilta listen?'

"'Yes, wife,' I says, an' I heerd her sob when I said it, but she catches hersen up again.

"'I want thee to mak' me a promise,' said she. 'I want thee to promise never to forget what peace we ha' had. I want thee to remember it allus, an' to moind him 'at's dead, an' let his little hand howd thee back fro' sin an' hard thowts. I'll pray fur thee neet an' day, Tim, an' tha shalt pray fur me, an' happen theer'll come a leet. But ef theer dunnot, dear lad—an' I dunnot see how theer could—if theer dunnot, an' we never see each other agen, I want thee to mak' me a promise that if tha sees th' little chap first tha'lt moind him o' me, and watch out wi' him nigh th' gate,

and I'll promise thee that if I see him first, I'll moind him o' thee an' watch out true an' constant.'

"I promised her, Mester, as yo' can guess, an' we kneeled down an' kissed th' grass, an' she took a bit o' th' sod to put i' her bosom. An' then we stood up an' looked at each other, an' at last she put her dear face on my breast an' kissed me, as she had done every neet sin' we were mon an' wife.

"'Good-bye, dear lad,' she whispers—her voice aw broken. 'Doant come back to th' house till I'm gone. Good-bye, dear, dear lad, an' God bless thee.' An' she slipped out o' my arms an' wur gone in a moment awmost before I could cry out.

* * * * *

"Theer isna much more to tell, Mester—th' eend's comin' now, an' happen it'll shorten off th' story, so 'at it seems suddent to thee. But it were na suddent to me. I lived alone here, an' worked, an' moinded my own business an' answered no questions fur nigh about a year, hearin' nowt, an' seein' nowt, an' hoping nowt, till one toime when th' daisies were blowin' on th' little grave here,

theer come to me a letter fro' Manchester fro' one o' th' medical chaps i' th' hospital. It wur a short letter wi' prent on it, an' the moment I seed it I knowed summat wur up, an' I opened it tremblin'. Mester, theer wur a woman lyin' i' one o' th' wards dyin' o' some long-named heart-disease, an' she'd prayed 'em to send fur me, an' one o' th' young soft-hearted ones had writ me a line to let me know.

"I started awmost afore I'd finished readin' th' letter, and when I'd getten to th' place I fun just what I knowed I should. I fun her—my wife—th' blessed lass, an' if I'd been an hour later I would na ha' seen her alive, fur she were nigh past knowin' me then.

"But I knelt down by th' bedside an' I plead wi' her as she lay theer, until I browt her back to th' world again fur one moment. Her eyes flew wide open aw at onct, an' she seed me an' smiled, aw her dear face quiverin' i' death.

"'Dear lad,' she whispered, 'th' path was na so long after aw. Th' Lord knew—he trod it hissen onct, yo know. I knowed tha'd come—I prayed so. I've reached th' very eend now, Tim, an' I shall see th' little lad first. But I wunnot

forget my promise—no. I'll look out—for thee—for thee—at th' gate.'

"An' her eyes shut slow an' quiet, an' I knowed she was dead.

"Theer, Mester Doncaster, theer it aw is, for theer she lies under th' daisies clost by her child, fur I browt her here an' buried her. Th' fellow as come betwixt us had tortured her fur a while an' then left her again, I fun out—an' she were so afeard of doin' me some harm that she wouldna come nigh me. It wur heart disease as killed her, th' medical chaps said, but I knowed better—it wur heart-break. That's aw. Sometimes I think o'er it till I canna stand it any longer, an' I'm fain to come heer an' lay my hand on th' grass,—an' sometimes I ha' queer dreams about her. I had one last neet. I thowt 'at she comn to me aw at onct just as she used to look, ony wi' her white face shinin' loike a star, an' she says, 'Tim, th' path isna so long after aw—tha's come nigh to th' eend, an' me an' th' little chap is waitin'. He knows thee, dear lad, fur I've towt him.'

"That's why I comn here to neet, Mester; an' I believe that's why I've talked so free to

thee. If I'm near th' eend I'd loike some one to know. I ha' meant no hurt when I seemed grum an' surly. It wurna ill-will but a heavy heart."

* * * * *

He stopped here, and his head drooped upon his hands again, and for a minute or so there was another dead silence. Such a story as this needed no comment. I could make none. It seemed to me that the poor fellow's sore heart could bear none. At length he rose from the turf and stood up, looking out over the graves into the soft light beyond with a strange, wistful sadness.

"Well, I mun go now," he said, slowly. "Good neet, Mester, good neet, an' thank yo fur listenin'."

"Good night," I returned, adding, in an impulse of pity that was almost a passion, "and God help you!"

"Thank you again, Mester!" he said, and then turned away; and as I sat pondering I watched his heavy drooping figure threading its way among the dark mounds and white marble, and under the shadowy trees, and out into the path beyond. I

did not sleep well that night. The strained, heavy tones of the man's voice were in my ears, and the homely, yet tragic story seemed to weave itself into all my thoughts, and keep me from rest. I could not get it out of my mind.

In consequence of this sleeplessness I was later than usual in going down to the factory, and when I arrived at the gates I found an unusual bustle there. Something out of the ordinary routine had plainly occurred, for the whole place was in confusion. There was a crowd of hands grouped about one corner of the yard, and as I came in a man ran against me, and showed me a terribly pale face.

"I ax pardon, Mester Doncaster," he said in a wild hurry, "but theer's an accident happened. One o' th' weavers is hurt bad, an' I'm goin' fur th' doctor. Th' loom caught an' crushed him afore we could stop it."

For some reason or other my heart misgave me that very moment. I pushed forward to the group in the yard-corner, and made my way through it.

A man was lying on a pile of coats in the middle of the bystanders,—a poor fellow crushed and torn and bruised, but lying quite quiet now, only

for an occasional little moan that was scarcely more than a quick gasp for breath. It was Surly Tim!

"He's nigh th' eend o' it now!" said one of the hands pityingly. "He's nigh th' last now, poor chap! What's that he's sayin', lads?"

For all at once some flickering sense seemed to have caught at one of the speaker's words, and the wounded man stirred, murmuring faintly—but not to the watchers. Ah, no! to something far, far beyond their feeble human sight—to something in the broad Without.

"Th' eend!" he said; "aye, this is th' eend, dear lass, an' th' path's aw shinin' or summat, an! —Why, lass, I can see thee plain, an' th' little chap too!"

Another flutter of the breath, one slight movement of the mangled hand, and I bent down closer to the poor fellow,—closer, because my eyes were so dimmed that I could not see.

"Lads," I said aloud a few seconds later, "you can do no more for him. His pain is over!"

For with the sudden glow of light which shone upon the shortened path and the waiting figures of his child and its mother, Surly Tim's earthly trouble had ended.

ONE DAY AT ARLE.

ONE day at Arle—a tiny scattered fishing hamlet on the north-western English coast—there stood at the door of one of the cottages near the shore a woman leaning against the lintel-post and looking out: a woman who would have been apt to attract a stranger's eye, too—a woman young and handsome. This was what a first glance would have taken in; a second would have been apt to teach more and leave a less pleasant impression. She was young enough to have been girlish, but she was not girlish in the least. Her tall, lithe, well-knit figure was braced against the door-post with a tense sort of strength; her handsome face was just at this time as dark and hard in expression as if she had been a woman with years of bitter life behind her; her handsome brows were knit, her lips were set; from

head to foot she looked unyielding and stern of purpose.

And neither form nor face belied her. The earliest remembrances of the coast people concerning Meg Lonas had not been over-pleasant ones. She had never been a favourite among them. The truth was they had half feared her, even as the silent, dogged, neglected child, who used to wander up and down among the rocks and on the beach, working harder for her scant living than the oldest of them. She had never a word for them, and never satisfied their curiosity upon the subject of the treatment she received from the ill-conditioned old grandfather who was her only living relative, and this last peculiarity had rendered her more unpopular than anything else would have done. If she had answered their questions they might have pitied her; but as she chose to meet them with stubborn silence, they managed to show their dislike in many ways, until at last it became a settled point among them that the girl was an outcast in their midst. But even in those days she gave them back wrong for wrong and scorn for scorn; and as she grew older she grew stronger of will, less prone to forgive her

many injuries and slights, and more prone to revenge them in an obstinate, bitter fashion. But as she grew older she grew handsomer too, and the fisher boys who had jeered at her in her childhood were anxious enough to gain her good-will.

The women flouted her still, and she defied them openly ; the men found it wisest to be humble in their rough style, and her defiance of them was more scornful than her defiance of their mothers and sisters. She would revenge herself upon them, and did, until at last she met a wooer who was tender enough, it seemed, to move her. At least so people said at first ; but suddenly the lover disappeared, and two or three months later the whole community was electrified by her sudden marriage with a suitor whom she had been wont to treat worse than all the rest. How she treated him after the marriage nobody knew. She was more defiant and silent than ever, and gossipers gained nothing by asking questions. So at last she was left alone.

It was not the face of a tender wife waiting for a loving husband, the face that was turned toward the sea. If she had hated the man for whom she watched she could not have seemed more unbend-

ing. Ever since her visitor had left her (she had had a visitor during the morning) she had stood in the same place, even in the same position, without moving, and when at last the figure of her husband came slouching across the sands homeward she remained motionless still.

And surely his was not the face of a happy husband. Not a handsome face at its dull best, it was doubly unprepossessing then, as, pale and breathless, he passed the stern form in the doorway, his nervous, reluctant eyes avoiding hers.

"Yo'll find yo're dinner aw ready on th' table," she said to him as he passed in.

Everything was neat enough inside. The fireplace was clean and bright, the table was set tidily, and the meal upon it was good enough in its way; but when the man entered he cast an unsteady, uncomprehending glance around, and when he had flung himself into a chair he did not attempt to touch the food, but dropped his face upon his arm on the table with a sound like a little groan.

She must have heard it, but she did not notice it even by a turn of her head, but stood erect and steadfast until he spoke to her. She might have been waiting for his words—perhaps she was.

"Tha canst come in an' say what tha has to say an' be done wi' it," he said at last, in a sullen, worn-out fashion.

She turned round then and faced him, harder to be met in her rigid mood than if she had been a tempest.

"Tha knows what I ha' getten to say," she answered, her tone strained and husky with repressed fierceness. "Aye! tha knows it well enough. I ha' not much need to tell thee owt. He comn here this morning an' he towd me aw I want to know about thee, Seth Lonas—an' more too."

"He comn to me," put in the man.

She advanced towards the table and struck it once with her hand.

"Thast towd me a power o' lies," she said. "Tha's lied to me fro' first to last to serve thy own eends, an' tha'st gained 'em—tha'st lied me away fro' th' man as wur aw th' world to me, but th' time's comn now when thy day's o'er an' his is comn agen. Ah! thou bitter villin! Does ta mind how tha comn an' towd me Dan Morgan had gone to th' fair at Lake wi' that lass o' Barnegats? That wor a lie an' that wor th' beginnin'. Dost ta mind how tha towd me as he

made light o' me when th' lads an' lasses plagued him, an' threeped 'em down as he didna mean to marry no such like lass as me—him as wor ready to dee fur me? That wor a lie an' that wor th' eendin', as tha knew it would be, fur I spurned him fro' me th' very neest day, an' wouldna listen when he tried to straighten out. But he got at th' truth at last when he wor fur fro' here, an' he browt th' truth back to me to-day, an' there's th' eend fur thee—husband or no."

The man lay with his head upon his arms until she had finished, and then he looked up all white and shaken and blind.

"Wilt ta listen if I speak to thee?" he asked.

"Aye," she answered, "listen to more lies!"

And she slipped down into a sitting posture on the stone door-step, and sat there, her great eyes staring out seaward, her hands lying loose upon her knee, and trembling.

There was something more in her mood than resentment. In this simple gesture she had broken down as she had never broken down in her life before. There was passionate grief in her face, a wild sort of despair, such as one might see in a suddenly-wounded, untamed creature. Hers

was not a fair nature. I am not telling the story of a gentle, true-souled woman—I am simply relating the incidents of one bitter day whose tragic close was the ending of a rough romance.

Her life had been a long battle against the world's scorn ; she had been either on the offensive or the defensive from childhood to womanhood, and then she had caught one glimpse of light and warmth, clung to it yearningly for one brief hour, and lost it.

Only to-day she had learned that she had lost it through treachery. She had not dared to believe in her bliss, even during its fairest existence ; and so when light-hearted, handsome Dan Morgan's rival had worked against him with false stories and false proofs, her fierce pride had caught at them, and her revenge had been swift and sharp. But it had fallen back upon her own head now. This very morning handsome Dan had come back again to Arle, and earned his revenge, too, though he had only meant to clear himself when he told her what chance had brought to light. He had come back—her lover, the man who had conquered and sweetened her bitter nature as nothing else on earth had power to do—he had come back

and found her what she was—the wife of a man for whom she had never cared, the wife of the man who had played them both false, and robbed her of the one poor gleam of joy she had known. She had been hard and wild enough at first, but just now, when she slipped down upon the door-step with her back turned to the wretched man within—when it came upon her that, traitor as he was, she herself had given him the right to take her bright-faced lover's place, and usurp his tender power—when the fresh sea-breeze blew upon her face and stirred her hair, and the warm, rare sunshine touched her, even breeze and sunshine helped her to the end, so that she broke down into a sharp, sharp sob, as any other woman might have done, only that the repressed strength of her poor warped nature made it a sob sharper and deeper than another woman's would have been.

"Yo mought ha' left me that!" she said. "Yo mought ha' left it to me! There wur other women as would ha' done yo, there wur no other man on earth as would do me. Yo knowed what my life had been, an' how it wur hand to hand between other folk an' me. Yo knowed how

much I cared fur him an' what he wur to me. You mought ha' let us be. I nivver harmed yo. I wouldna harm yo so sinful cruel now."

"Wilt ta listen?" he asked, laboring as if for breath.

"Aye," she answered him, "I'll listen, for tha canna hurt me worser. Th' day fur that's past an' gone."

"Well," said he, "listen an' I'll try to tell yo. I know it's no use, but I mun say a word or two. Happen yo didna know I loved yo aw yo're life—happen yo didna, but it's true. When yo wor a little lass gatherin' sea-weed on th' sands I watched yo when I wur afeared to speak—afeared lest yo'd gi' me a sharp answer, fur yo wor ready enow wi' 'em, wench. I've watched yo fur hours when I wur a great lubberly lad, an' when yo gettin' to be a woman it wur the same thing. I watched yo an' did yo many a turn as yo knowed nowt about. When yo wur searchin' fur drift to keep up th' fire after th' owd mon deed an' left yo alone, happen yo nivver guessed as it wur me as heaped little piles i' th' nooks o' th' rocks so as yo'd think 'at th' tide had left it theer—happen yo didn't, but it wor true. I've stayed round th'

old house many a night feared summat mought harm yo, an' yo know yo nivver gave me a good word, Meg. An' then Dan comn an' he made way wi' yo as he made way wi' aw th' rest—men an' women an' children. He nivver worked an' waited as I did—he nivver thowt an' prayed as I did; everything come easy wi' him—everything allus did come easy wi' him, an' when I seed him so light-hearted an' careless about what I wor cravin' it run me daft an' blind. Seemt like he couldna cling to it like I did, an' I begun to fight agen it, an' when I heerd about that lass o' Barnegats I towd yo, an' when I seed yo believed what I didna believe mysen it run me dafter yet, an' I put more to what he said, an' held back some, an' theer it wor an' theer it stands, an' if I've earnt a curse, lass, I've getten it, fur—fur I thowt yo'd been learnin' to care fur me a bit sin' we wor wed, an' God knows I've tried to treat yo fair an' kind i' my poor way. I worna Dan Morgan's way, I know—his wur a better way than mine, th' sun shone on him, somehow—but I've done my best an' truest sin'."

"Yo've done yo're worst," she said. "Th' worst yo could do wur to part us, an' yo did it

If yo'd been half a mon yo wouldna ha' been content wi' a woman yo'd trapped wi' sayin' 'Aye,' an' who cared less for yo than she did fur th' sand on th' sea-shore. What's what yo've done sin' to what yo did afore? Yo cannot wipe that out and yo cannot mak' me forget. I hate yo, an' th' worse because I wor beginnin' to be content a bit. I hate mysen. I ought to ha' knowed"—wildly—"he would ha' knowed whether I wor true or false, poor chap—he would ha' knowed."

She rocked herself to and fro for a minute, wringin' her hands in a passion of anguish worse than any words, but a minute later she turned on him all at once.

"All 's o'er between yo an' me," she said with fierce heat; "do yo know that? If yo wor half a mon yo would."

He sat up an' stared at her humbly and stupidly.

"Eh?" he said at last.

"Theer's not a mon i' Arle as is not more to me now than tha art," she said. "Some on 'em be honest, an' I canna say that o' thee. Tha canst get thee gone or I'll go mysen. Tha

know'st me well enow to know I'll ne'er forgie thee for what tha's done. Aye"—with the passionate hand-wringing again—"but that wunnot undo it."

He rose and came to her, trembling like a man with the ague.

"Yo dunnot mean that theer, Meg," he said slowly. "Yo dunnot mean it word fur word. Think a bit."

"Aye but I do," she answered him, setting her white teeth, "word fur word."

"Think again, wench." And this time he staggered and caught hold of the door-post. "Is theer nowt as 'll go agen th' wrong? I've lived wi' thee nigh a year, an' I've loved thee twenty—is theer nowt fur me? Aye, lass, dunnot be too hard. Tha was allus harder than most womankind; try an' be a bit softer like to'rds th' mon as risked his soul because he wur a mon an' dare na lose thee. Tha laid tha head on my shoulder last neet. Aye, lass—lass, think o' that fur one minnit."

Perhaps she did think of it, for surely she faltered a little—what woman would not have faltered at such a moment?—but the next, the

memory of the sunny half-boyish face she had clung to with so strong a love, rushed back upon her and struck her to the heart. She remembered the days when her life had seemed so full that she had feared her own bliss; she remembered the gallant speeches and light-hearted wiles, and all at once she cried out in a fierce impassioned voice: "I'll ne'er forgie thee," she said—"I'll ne'er forgie thee to th' last day o' my life. What for should I? Tha's broke my heart, thou villain—tha's broke my heart." And the next minute she had pushed past him and rushed into the house.

For a minute or so after she was gone the man stood leaning against the door with a dazed look in his pale face. She meant what she said: he had known her long enough to understand that she never forgave—never forgot. Her unbroken will and stubborn strength had held her to enmities all her life, and he knew she was not to be won by such things as won other women. He knew she was harder than most women, but his dull nature could not teach him how bitter must have been the life that rendered her so. He had never thought of it—he did not think of it now. He was not blaming her, and he was scarcely

blaming himself. He had tried to make her happy and had failed. There were two causes for the heavy passion of misery that was ruling him, but neither of them was remorse.

His treachery had betrayed him, and he had lost the woman he had loved and worked for. Soul and body were sluggish alike, but each had its dull pang of weight and wretchedness.

"I've come to th' eend now, surely," he said, and dropping into her seat, he hid his face.

As he sat there a choking lump rose in his throat with a sudden click, and in a minute or so more he was wiping away hot rolling tears with the back of his rough hand.

"I'm forsook somehow," he said—"aye, I'm forsook. I'm not th' soart o' chap to tak' up wi' th' world. She wor all th' world I cared fur, an' she'll ne'er forgie me, for she's a hard un—she is. Aye! but I wur fond o' her! I wonder what she'll do—I do wonder i' my soul what she's gettin' her mind on!"

It did not occur to him to call to her or go and see what she was doing. He had always stood in some dull awe of her, even when she had been kindest, and now it seemed that they were too far

apart for any possibility of approach at reconciliation. So he sat and pondered heavily, the sea air blowing upon him fresh and sweet, the sun shining soft and warm upon the house, and the few common flowers in the strip of garden whose narrow shell walks and borders he had laid out for her himself, with much clumsy planning and slow labor.

Then he got up and took his rough working jacket over his arm.

"I mun go down to th' *Mary Anne*," he said, "an' work a bit, or we'll ne'er get her turned o'er afore th' tide comes in. That boat's a moit o' trouble." And he sighed heavily.

Half-way to the gate he stopped before a cluster of ground honeysuckle, and perhaps for the first time in his life was conscious of a sudden curious admiration for them.

"She's powerful fond o' such like bits o' things —posies an' such like," he said. "Them's some as I planted to please her on th' very day as we were wed. I'll tak' one or two. She's most fond on 'em—fur such a hard un."

And when he went out he held in his hand two or three slender stems hung with the tiny pretty

humble bells. Who knows whether some subtle influence at work in soul or body, or even the air he breathed, did not prompt the novel mood?

* * * * *

He had these very bits of simple blossoms in his hand when he went down to where the *Mary Anne* lay on the beach for repairs. So his fellow-workmen said when they told the story afterwards, remembering even this trivial incident.

He was in a strange frame of mind, too, they noticed, silent and heavy and absent. He did not work well, but lagged over his labour, stopping every now and then to pass the back of his hand over his brow as if to rouse himself.

"Yo look as if yo an' th' missus had had a fallin' out, an' yo'n getten th' worst o' th' bargain," one of his comrades said by way of rough jest.

They were fond of joking with him about his love for his handsome taciturn wife. But he did not laugh this time as he usually did.

"Mind thy own tackle, lad," he said, dully, "an' I'll mind mine."

From that time he worked steadily among them until it was nearly time for the tide to rise. The boat they were repairing had been a difficult

job to manage, as they could only work between tides, and now being hurried they lingered longer than usual. At the last minute they found it must be moved, and so were detained.

"Better leave her until th' tide ebbs," said one, but the rest were not of the same mind.

"Nay," they argued, "it'll be all to do o'er again if we do that. Theer's plenty o' time if we look sharp enow. Heave again, lads."

Then it was that with the help of straining and tugging there came a little lurch, and then it was that as the *Mary Anne* slipped over on her side one of the workers slipped with her, slipped half underneath her with a cry, and lay on the sand, held down by the weight that rested on him.

With his cry there broke out half a dozen others, and the men rushed up to him with frightened faces.

"Are yo hurt, Seth, lad?" they cried. "Are yo crushed or owt?"

The poor fellow stirred a little and then looked up at them pale enough.

"Bruised a bit," he answered them, "an' sick a bit, but I dunnot think theer's any bones broke. Look sharp, chaps, an' heave her up. She's a moit o' weight on me.

They went to work again one and all, so relieved by his words that they were doubly strong, but after toiling like giants for a while they were compelled to pause for breath. In falling the boat had so buried herself in the sand that she was harder to move than ever. It had seemed simple enough at first, but it was not so simple after all. With all their efforts they had scarcely stirred her an inch, and their comrade's position interfered with almost every plan suggested. Then they tried again, but this time with less effect than before, through their fatigue. When they were obliged to pause they looked at each other questioningly, and more than one of them turned a trifle paler, and at last the wisest of them spoke out.

"Lads," he said, "we canna do this oursens. Run for help, Jem Coulter, an' run wi' thy might, fur it wunnot be so long afore th' tide 'll flow.

Up to this time the man on the sands had lain with closed eyes and set teeth, but when he heard this his eyes opened, and he looked up.

"Eh," he said, in that blind stupid fashion. "What's that theer tha's sayin', Mester?"

"Th' tide," blundered the speaker. "I wor tellin' him to look sharp, that's aw."

The poor fellow moved restlessly.

"Aye, aye," he said. "Look sharp—he mun do that. I didna think o' th' tide." And he shut his eyes again with a faint groan.

They strove while the messenger was gone; they strove when he returned with assistance; they strove with might and main, until not a man among them had the strength of a child, and the boldest of them were blanching with a fearful, furtive excitement none dared to show. A crowd had gathered round by this time—men willing and anxious to help, women suggesting new ideas and comforting the wounded man in rough earnest style, children clinging to their mothers' gowns and looking on terror-stricken. Suddenly, in the midst of one of their mightiest efforts, a sharp childish voice piped out from the edge of an anxious group a brief warning that struck terror to every heart that beat among them.

"Eh! Mesters!" it said, "th' tide's creepin' up a bit."

The men looked round with throbbing pulses, the women looked also, and one of the younger ones broke into a low cry. "Lord ha' mercy!" she said, "it'll sweep around th' Bend afore long

an'—an'—" and she ended with a terror in her voice which told its own tale without other words.

The truth forced itself upon them all then. Women began to shriek and men to pray, but, strange to say, the man whose life was at stake lay silent, though with ashen lips, about which the muscles were tensely drawn.

His dull eyes searched every group in a dead despair that was yet a passion, in all its stillness.

"How long will it be," he asked slowly at last —"th' tide? Twenty minutes?"

"Happen so," was the answer. "An' lad, lad! we canna help thee. We'n tried our best, lad"—with sobs even from the uncouth fellow who spoke. "Theer is na one on us but 'ud leave a limb behind to save thee, but theer isna time—theer is na—"

One deep groan and he lay still again—quite still. God knows what weight of mortal agony and desperate terror crushed him in that dead, helpless pause.

Then his eyes opened as before.

"I've thowt o' deein'," he said with a queer catch of his breath. "I've thowt o' deein', an' I've wondered how it wor an' what it felt like. I

never thowt o' deein' like this here." Another pause and then—

"Which o' yo lads 'll tell my missus?"

"Ay! poor chap, poor chap!" wailed the women. "Who on 'em will?"

"Howd tha noise, wenches," he said hoarsely. "Yo daze me. Theer is na time to bring her here. I'd ha' liked to ha' said a word to her. I' ha' liked to ha' said one word; Jem Coulter—" raising his voice—"canst tha say it fur me?"

"Aye," cried the man, choking as he spoke, "surely, surely." And he knelt down.

"Tell her 'at if it wor bad enow—this here—it wor not so bad as it mought ha' been—fur *me*. I mought ha' fun it worser. Tell her I'd like to ha' said a word if I could—but I couldna. I'd like to ha' heard her say one word as happen she would ha' said if she'd been here, an' tell her 'at if she had ha' said it, th' tide mought ha' comn an' welcome—but she didna, an' theer it stands." And the sob that burst from his breast was like the sob of a death-stricken child. "Happen"—he said next—"happen one o' yo women foak say a bit o' a prayer—yo're not so fur fro' safe sand but

yo can reach it—happen one o' yo ha' a word or two as yo could say—such like as yo teach yo're babbies."

Among these was one who had—thank God! thank God!—and so, amid wails and weeping, rough men and little children alike knelt with uncovered heads and hidden eyes while this one woman faltered the prayer that was a prayer for a dying man; and when it was ended, and all rose glancing fearfully at the white line of creeping foam, this dying man for whom they had prayed lay upon his death-bed of sand the quietest of them all—quiet with a strange calm.

"Bring me my jacket," he said, "an' lay it o'er my face. Theer's a bit o' a posie in the button-hole. I getten it out o' th' missus's garden when I comn away. I'd like to hold it i' my hand if it's theer yet."

And as the long line of white came creeping onward they hurriedly did as he told them—laid the rough garment over his face and gave him the humble dying flowers to hold, and having done this and lingered to the last moment, one after the other dropped away with awe-stricken souls until the last was gone. And under the arch of sunny

sky the little shining waves ran up the beach, chasing each other over the glittering sand, catching at shells and sea-weed, toying with them for a moment and then leaving them, rippling and curling and whispering, but creeping—creeping—creeping.

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They gave his message to the woman he had loved with all the desperate strength of his dull yet unchanging nature; and when the man who gave it to her saw her wild, white face and hard-set lips, he blundered upon some dim guess as to what that single word might have been, but the sharpest of them never knew the stubborn anguish that, following and growing day by day, crushed her fierce will and shook her heart. She was as hard as ever, they thought; but they were none of them the men or women to guess at the long, dormant instinct of womanhood and remorse that the tragedy of this one day of her life had awakened. She had said that she would never forgive him, and perhaps her very strength made it long before she did; but surely some subtle chord was touched by those heavy last words, for

when, months later, her first love came back faithful and tender, with his old tale to tell, she would not listen.

"Nay, lad," she said, "I amna a feather to blow wi' th' wind. I've had my share o' trouble wi' men foak, and I ha' no mind to try again. Him as lies i' th' churchyard loved me i' his way —men foak's way is apt to be a poor un—an' I'm wore out wi' life. Dunnot come here courtin'— tak' a better woman."

THE END.

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