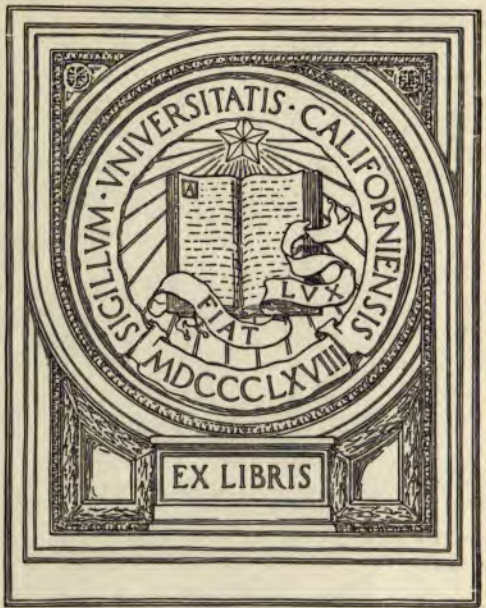


"Nicolas's hand shot out and caught her by the wrist."

THE CRYSTAL HEART

BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

AUTHOR OF "THE DARK TOWER," "THE SECOND FIDDLE," "THE SERVANT OF REALITY," ETC.

WITH PEN-AND-INK DRAWINGS
BY NORMAN PRICE

AND FRONTISPIECE BY
R. L. VAN BUREN

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1921

Printed in U. S. A.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Mary Preston Dean
Dec 20th 1921

THE CRYSTAL HEART

THE CRYSTAL HEART

Love was born on a May morn,
But he died
At eventide,
An eventide in June.

—E. H. Coleridge.

I

MRS. FEATHERSTONE had called her Joy because she came into the world with the barest whimper, and seemed subsequently to be so contented with her arrival.

She liked all the things that babies usually like, warmth and her mother's breast, the feel of responsible fingers and safe knees. But she liked also, from the first, the hazard and strangeness of baths, the hard, bright rims of basins, the loneliness of her deep cot, and the clutch of her helpless fingers upon naked air. Nobody needed to provide Joy with a dummy or a coral ring. Behind her very large blue eyes lay secrets of incommunicable mirth.

Elder sisters might nurse her with the awkward handling of awe, presumptuous brothers might toss her toward the ceiling with the impunity of ignorance, she might be left alone for hours to crawl all over the vast expanses of the nursery floor, and when a remorseful nurse hurried upstairs, after an inordinate tea, to see what had happened to baby, Joy would still be found smiling unexactingly at the universe.

Earth and air were alike to Joy, a friendly playground; and human beings, even her father with his irritating beard, born to be her playfellows. For all the animal creation she had an ecstatic and unhesitating ardor. At two years old the highest form of human pleasure known to her was being hurled upon a gravel path by an Airedale and having her fur bonnet amicably worried. Reinforced by a biblical picture in the nursery, her love of lambs became a mania. At three years old she was accused of blasphemy because she persisted in stating to an elder sister that she had found the Lamb of God in the field below the garden.

She was discovered at the same early age following the local shepherd and his flock, trailing faint, but eager, in the dusty rear of the sheep,

two miles from home, under a pink sunbonnet, fully convinced that she had found the Good Shepherd, and was approaching paradise. The shepherd apologized profusely for this involuntary abduction, but averred that he could n't call her "off it," she was "that set."

Even at three years old Joy was a difficult baby to convince of sin. Her visions shook reality out of her head, and made her deal elastically with circumstance. All the little Featherstones (there were nine of them) were plucky. They had been taught by their mother never to tell lies and not to cry when they were hurt, but usually they had some sense of the inimical in things and people.

Joy had none. If a hand had been raised against her, she would have grasped it confidingly; nor was there any enmity set between her and a serpent.

Day after day, unknown to the entire household, she visited a vicious horse in the stables. She had heard her father say it was "a dangerous brute," and she knew he meant something not very nice by "brute," but she did not know what he meant by "dangerous." It hurt Joy to think that so noble a creature as a horse should be called something that did not sound quite nice.

She was afraid that Skylark might have overheard the criticism and taken it to heart. She had to stand on a wooden box to reach up to the handle of the loose-box, but she opened the door very carefully, so as not to startle Skylark, who stood looking down at her with all the whites of his vicious eyes rolling, his teeth bared, and his ears plastered flat against his wicked head. He had not quite made up his mind what he was going to do to her.

Joy stood quietly under his nose, holding an apple out on a flat hand, and murmuring affectionate and unveracious praises of his nature.

Skylark's great nostrils dilated nervously above her, and then he moved to one side to give the little figure room, dropped his velvet nose down to her hand, and took his apple. It cannot be said that a fruit diet altered Skylark's unpleasant disposition, but he never betrayed his temper to Joy.

What she took him to be he was as far as she was concerned until Mr. Featherstone succeeded in selling him to a friend.

After Skylark's departure Joy tried to content herself with the stable cat, a creature of nomad habits and without natural affections. The stable

cat had lost an ear, her frequent families vanished like the dawn, and she had no charm for any one but Joy. Joy was heard murmuring softly over her as she tried to claw her way out of the child's sheltering arms: "You must n't mind not being a dog, dear Kitty, nor even an inside cat. I love you much the best, and I spect God does. You see, it 's so *kind* of you to be a stable cat."

The dogs (the entire household of dogs, ranging between eight and ten, and not counting Mr. Featherstone's two retrievers, who were not allowed indoors) worshiped the ground Joy walked on. They belonged to the other children (Joy was seldom the legal possessor of anything), but they served Joy first in the spirit. When she came dancing out on the lawn, they let the nine points of the law escape, and danced with her. Joy always danced. She danced on the tips of her toes when she was angry, and she danced like an unflurried bird when she was glad.

What she did when she was sad was never known; there was no apparent pause between her ecstasies. She grew a little wistful sometimes over the sharp nursery feuds which raged above her devoted head, or she could take a violent tooth-and-claw part in them when roused; but

nothing baffled for long her sense of life's enchantments.

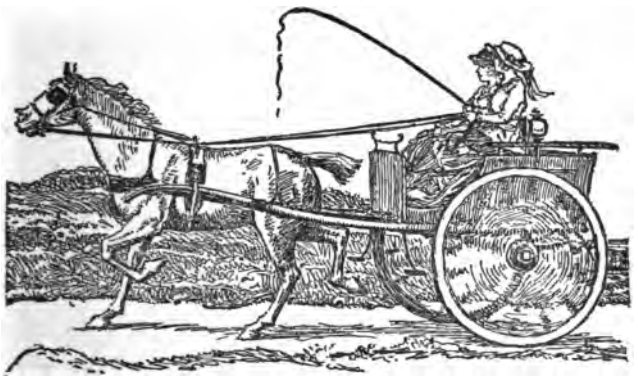
She set the multiplication table to a tune, and when she was given dry bread and water for a punishment, she turned it into a fairy-story, and asked if she might have it every night for a treat. Joy was not a naughty child, but life did not have the same horizons for her as it had for the other children; her horizons were farther away and more luminous.

They were all children of the same parents, but they called themselves the "first" and "second" families on account of a prolonged break in their ages. Margaret, Paul, James, and Walter were all old, and vanished into the world rapidly, with infrequent and romantic returns. Joy and Maude, Archie and Rosemary, were comparatively young and had an air of permanence.

Rosemary was so young that she was like Joy's own child. Joy was nine when Rosemary was born, and in an instant her passion for puppies, kittens, dolls, and even waterfalls sank into insignificance. Joy loved everything and everybody still, but she knew, when she gazed down at this unexpected visitant, pinched, a little yellow, with a whining cry and a rather more unstable neck

than most babies, that she could never love anything so much again.

Maude was Joy's companion sister,—there was barely a year between them,—and they did everything together; but Maude was n't like a new-born baby. On the contrary, she often seemed older and wiser than Joy. She knew more about the



"Maude was Joy's companion sister,—and they did everything together"

world and how to act in it, and she was n't at all easily dazzled by its charms. The likeness between the sisters was very strong, but all Joy's features that ought to be small were smaller, and all her features that ought to be large were larger, than Maude's. Her coloring was delicately, firmly pink, whereas Maude's coloring in moments of excitement or emotion turned to mauve.

Maude deeply resented these differences, but she was relieved to find, as she grew older, that she usually got what she wanted, whereas Joy, tentative and never on the lookout for possession, made few acquisitions, and could usually be induced to part easily with those that she had.

Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone seldom interfered with their children and lived a long way off. There were three flights of stairs between the nursery and the drawing-room, and there was a great gulf fixed between middle-aged Victorian imaginations and those of their offspring.

Mrs. Featherstone was still a very handsome woman, and her husband had been exceptionally good-looking when he was young. Unfortunately, he had not worn well. Life had picked out his weaknesses and had set them on his face. He was not a strong character, and he reinforced his decisions by a spirit of petty tyranny. He was not a reasonable man, and he had a good many principles, which he fell back upon for defense when his intellect failed him. This is apt to be an aggravating quality in family life, especially when the principles are said to be religious; and it must be confessed that Mr. Featherstone irritated his family exceedingly. When they got the

better of him intellectually, he laid them out morally, and put an edge to their exasperation by applying penalties. He had not so strong a nature as his wife, and he never forgave her for finding it out.

Mrs. Featherstone was a tolerant, quiet woman with a dreadful courage and a merciless sense of humor. She was not the wife for a weak, vain man who wanted to pose as master in his own house. She let him pose, but he knew that she saw through his pose.

Mrs. Featherstone never laughed at him out loud, and she never gave him away to any one else, not even to her children. She belonged to a generation of women who kept married unhappiness to themselves and did not think it a matter of great importance.

Mrs. Featherstone loved the country, the moors, which stretched for miles behind the house, and the sea, which lay beneath the cliffs in front of it, with passion. She loved her children with indulgence and common sense, and she did not love her husband at all. Yet she no more dreamed of giving him up than she dreamed of giving up Rock Lodge because it faced north and the kitchen range was extremely inconvenient.

She never failed Mr. Featherstone in any of the duties of a wife, and as a housekeeper she was faultless. Mrs. Featherstone had never been very intimate even with her children, but they all adored her and took from her their cue to life. She had no favorites; that is to say, no one discovered which was her favorite. She did not punish easily, and she never praised.

She visited the nursery at breakfast-time, kissing each child once, satisfied herself that they were clean, healthy, and without real grievances, and did not see them again until after nursery tea, when she had them down-stairs with her till bedtime. If there were visitors, the children played by themselves with drawing-room toys on the floor, and if they were alone, Mrs. Featherstone read out loud to them in a musical voice, and with a singularly perfect diction, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and Tennyson's poetry.

She never allowed any of her children to tell tales, or to boast of anything they could do or possessed. The most awful thing she could say, because they knew how very much she meant it, was, "You are not behaving like a well-bred child." Nevertheless, in moments of real grief all the children knew they could safely turn to their

mother. She did not underestimate youthful disaster.

When the stable cat died (to be accurate, she came by her death through having given undue provocation to Archie's new bull-terrier) and Mrs. Featherstone found Joy lying prostrate beside her, having tried, without advantage, stretching herself over Eliza's mangled form seven times, according to the familiar example of the prophet Elijah when raising the widow's only son, Mrs. Featherstone knew that no light comfort would suffice.

Joy was confronted by death for the first time, and the universe reeled under the shock of her discovery.

Mrs. Featherstone took Joy into her arms and set to work to rob the grave of its victory.

"Poor Eliza," she said soothingly, "will never feel pain any more."

"She can't lap milk," wailed Joy. "Why can't Eliza lap milk? I 've tried, oh, I 've tried so hard to raise her! I 've asked God till I 'm sick of Him. I don't believe He 's there. I don't believe a kind God would make a cat go stiff for nothing."

Mrs. Featherstone's mind raced hurriedly over

the possible alternatives to this problem and rejected all the more plausible ones.

"I 'm afraid," she said gently, "it was Archie's new bull-terrier who did it. You know we can all hurt each other if we like. God lets us, but He does n't like it. He wants us to help each other instead. But if we had n't the power to do harm, we could n't have the power to do good, either. We must have both; and if we misuse our power, dreadful things happen."

Joy's sob slackened.

"I 'm not sure," she said tearfully, and it was her first doubt of any created thing, "that God *ought* to have made a bull-terrier at all if He did n't want Eliza to be hurt. O Mummy, what happens to stiff cats?"

Mrs. Featherstone looked at Eliza, dispassionately. It was difficult to predict a future for a cat of such exclusively materialistic habits, but she did the best she could, and suggested a handsome funeral for Eliza's immediate present.

"And may we pick the Madonna lilies under the wall?" asked Joy, leaping to her feet in recovered ecstasy.

Much to the gardener's annoyance, Mrs. Featherstone agreed to the sacrifice of the lilies, and

Eliza's grave was strewn with this inappropriate emblem. Joy danced hand in hand with Mrs. Featherstone about the sacred spot, singing with touching fervor her favorite hymn,

> There is a Home for little children,
> above the bright blue sky.

It is to be hoped that Eliza's spirit was accommodated elsewhere, as she had a very strong dislike of children, and would have deeply resented any home which was given up to them.

Mrs. Featherstone read the "Morte d'Arthur" out loud to the assembled family after tea. She knew that as a picture of death it was a little fanciful, but she longed to remove the last traces of horror that still lingered in Joy's eyes.

The reading was a great success. The seven queens and the dark barge overlaid the specter of reality. Eliza and King Arthur floated into the land of Avalon together,

> Where far beyond those voices there is peace.

II

IT was Joy's fourteenth birthday and the first of June. She started the day at dawn. Every bird in Devonshire was awake, and all of them seemed to Joy to be in the Rock Lodge garden.

Fat thrushes with operatic voices shook themselves into trances, blackbirds, with ringing notes piercingly sweet and loud, got the better of the most reluctant worms, and divided their talents with impartial rapture between securing their breakfast and making most meticulous music. Chaffinches sprayed their brief melodies from bough to bough, and every finch and lark and tiny wren set the seal of their loud joy upon the morning.

Far away in a hollow glen the cuckoo dropped his wandering challenges, playing hide and seek with outraged heads of families. Muffling the ecstatic screams of a fox-terrier puppy called Absolom under her skirt, Joy crept out upon the lawn.

The lawn was very wet with dew, and Joy had taken neither time nor pains over her toilet. She was the age of *Juliet,* but she had none of *Juliet's* preoccupations. Her mind was as blank and innocent as a new-born leaf blowing this way and that to catch a light adventure. She looked back at the old house with a sudden thrill at her heart. It was hers; it must be hers forever. The transfiguring golden light covered it, and the birds' persistent voices all around it made it like a shell of melody. All the happiness of Joy's smooth and eager years was harvested in its old walls.

She could not think of life without her home. The mossy, precipitous drive the horses had to be lead so carefully up and down, the swift drops and scrambles of the little paths from rocky platform to rocky platform on which garden beds yielded only to the stoutest and most persistent flowers, were as much a part of her as Maude and Archie. The Rock Lodge garden was bad for gardeners, but it was a paradise for children. Joy put Absolom down gingerly, and watched a white and clamorous streak pass through the shrubberies and out on to the moors. Absolom had smelt rabbits, and the law and the prophets no longer existed for him.

There was nothing to be done but to fly after him. Joy's skirts were short, her legs were long and slender; she flew without increase of breath up the steep path which led to the moor. She had not meant to go to the moor; she had meant to go down to the village and thank the villagers for sending her presents. She had found in the hall, left overnight, a jackdaw, two baby rabbits in a basket, cowslip wine, and heather honey. They came from the little pink, shell-like cottages hidden in the trees below her. Lynton was full of smiling, calm, immovable people with strong instincts and pleasant manners, who hated slowly and steadily, loved forever, and on the whole minded their own business with placidity; and they were all Joy's friends. Nobody ever hurried or altered their plans at Lynton, or tried to please anybody more than they intended to go on pleasing them, and nobody ever changed.

"So if I live here always," Joy thought as she hurried up the path, "they 'll always love me." Life stretched before her like the summer day, sunny and inexhaustible.

When she reached the top of the moor above the house, Absolom had vanished.

Far away, and yet so near that she could have

dropped a pebble on to it, lay the lawn of Rock Lodge, with the unshaken summer sea, as still as bluebells in a wood, beneath it. The little perched and sliding town of Lynton clung to the cliff's-edge above the deep-green valley of the Watersmeet. The valley lay between two steep and heather-tufted cliffs; a rapid river with waterfalls tossed a bright, impatient way under green bushes from end to end of it.

Three streams met high up in the valley, raged and played together in a fine lather of waterfalls, and then united in a swift and businesslike way in a race to the sea. Joy had followed all the streams to their source and knew half their secrets, where to find a company of kingcups overlooking a deep pool, and where the big trout lay under the shelving rock.

But she never told the boys where the trout lay; she had no wish for the death of living things. It was one of the reasons why she liked best to be alone with Absolom and Rosemary. Absolom and Rosemary were too young to kill anything; they could chase rabbits all day long, and no one be the worse for it. Nicolas was different. He liked to kill rats in a barn with terriers, and he liked it better if Joy was there to see. Not that

you could call Nicolas cruel; he was remarkably kind. He carried Rosemary for hours on his back when she was tired, and mended anything that was broken. Nicolas was part of Joy's life, too, quite as much as any of her brothers; rather more, perhaps. Not that Joy could have described what Nicolas was to her. He was Nicolas, and came a long way after Rosemary in her affections.

The Pennants, who were his people, lived only four miles away at Foxglove Hall, and came over constantly on ponies. The only fault Joy had ever had to find in Nicolas beyond the rats, which was hardly a fault, as all boys shared the same desire for their extinction, was that Maude wanted him to like her best, and Nicolas would n't. Joy had explained to Nicolas that it would be much simpler if he would like Maude best, and that he could go on liking Joy second best, which would suit her just as well and be pleasanter all round; and Nicolas, with his curiously hard and honest eyes fixed on her, had said, "You little fool, I shall like you best as long as I live."

It was curious how this remark had remained with her. She remembered it again now as she sat on a tuft of heather, her eyes ranging far and wide in her search for Absolom. Nicolas had not

explained why he cared for her like that; but, then, Nicolas never explained things: he only did them when he had said he was going to do them, and even sometimes when he had not.

He was going to take her to the Doone Valley this afternoon alone, and, if her mother would let her, on Fidget. As soon as she could recover Absolom, Joy must go and look for her mother in the harness-room and ask her for leave to ride Fidget. It was tiresome that on her birthday she was n't to have Archie and Maude with her, but Nicolas had said it was his last day at home, where a broken collar-bone had conveniently laid him, and that he would have his own way about it. He would n't have minded Rosemary, but it was too far to take her, and Nicolas had been so beautifully kind to Joy—he had saved all his pocket money for ages to buy her a brindle bulldog pup. The puppy was to be called Ajax and was very fat; if you stuck a finger into him he rolled over. He was the most deliciously ferocious-looking lamb of a puppy, and Nicolas was training him to be obedient. The training had got as far as Ajax sitting down and wagging his tail, with his head on one side, and all his wrinkles looking very anxious, whenever Nicolas addressed him.

Ajax was one of the dreams of Joy's life realized, and she shrank from being ungracious to the giver of a dream.

The silence of the moors inclosed Joy as if the skies were walls. She sat very still, because it seemed as if her whole being was surrounded by something unseen. It was a curious feeling that she had had before when she was quite alone. If you kept perfectly still and did n't think of anything at all, you melted away from yourself; you became a part of the day and of the listening air. It was a very wonderful feeling, only you could never tell any one about it. It was like being a part of God.

Three white gulls, sailing on their motionless wings, sank down almost on a level with her head. She watched the shadows their great wings made by her on the grass; their uncanny, changeless, yellow eyes rested on her as if to see whether she was fugitive or a landmark. It was quieter than ever when they were gone, so quiet that Joy could hear her own heart beat, and the light air which stirred the grasses had a song in it. Everything she loved was fast asleep below her; only behind the silent beauty something that was akin to her was stirring. It was as if she and the heather,

the butterflies, and the small golden bees, the wide and motionless sea, the raveled fleeces of the summer clouds, were all balanced and held upon a giant hand.

The silence was like the breath of some great being; and if his silence was so golden, what would be his speech? Far away below her in the time-ridden world she heard a clock strike eight.

It was a long while before the sound reached her senses. When it did, she shivered as if she were called back from a perpetual safety. Mother would be up now in the harness-room cleaning Fidget's harness. Far away at the cliff's-edge Joy caught a flash of white moving in and out of the low furze-bushes. The flash stopped dead as her voice recalled it. "Absolom! Absolom!" For a few moments Absolom continued his search, pretending that he had heard nothing, but not for long. Joy was upon him fleeter than his own four legs, and had him by the scruff of the neck. He slued a wicked, jocular eye at her, well knowing the worst that would come to him, and as soon as he was released after a perfunctory shake, crept with imitation shivers to her heel.

Mrs. Featherstone had bought Fidget with her pig money. The grooms had enough to do with

the carriage horses, two hunters, and the children's ponies, so Mrs. Featherstone did everything for Fidget herself.

Fidget was a standing reproach to the grooms. Her coat was as soft as satin, her harness sparkled on the dullest mornings, and her leather had the fine smoothness of a laurel-leaf.

Her character was almost worth the care taken over her personal appearance, for Fidget had a warm and generous heart. She was at once lively and reliable, and if she had not been so obviously a lady, she might have been described as a "perfect gentleman."

She let herself go on grass, and walked delicately as if on egg-shells down the awkward drive. Any one with judgment and nerve could ride her, but it must be owned that she felt herself compelled to unseat any one who attempted to ride her without these two qualities. She gave her best to her rider, and expected consideration and sympathy in return. Joy slipped into the harness-room, Absolom bustling in beside her with an air of never having left her side.

Mrs. Featherstone kissed her daughter with unusual tenderness. She wondered if many mothers had so straight and lithe and beautiful a girl to

greet upon her fourteenth birthday, and knew that none of them had ever greeted one so innocent, and so unconscious of her beauty.

"I 'm going with Nicolas if I may," Joy asked breathlessly, "and may I ride Fidget as a birthday treat? If I must n't, may we have lunch and walk? We want to go to the top of the Doone Valley.

"I finished 'Lorna Doone' last night. Nicolas promised to take me. He says all the savage Doones are dead, but I think there might be rather a nice one left."

Mrs. Featherstone took up Fidget's immaculate bit and redoubled the polish on it.

"And what about Maude and Archie?" she asked.

"Nicolas says not," Joy explained regretfully. "He thinks the ponies could n't take them there and back, and, besides, I don't think he particularly wants them. Archie says he does n't care about the Doones if they 're dead, anyway; but I think Maude would have liked to go."

"And yet Nicolas seems to have thought it not too far for you to walk," said Mrs. Featherstone, reflectively.

"He knows a short cut for walking," Joy ex-

plained; "but walking is n't quite so like a birthday, is it?"

"No," agreed Mrs. Featherstone. "Well, you 'll be quite all right with Nicolas, of course, and you may ride Fidget. Only come back in time for your birthday tea at five, and bring Nicolas with you. The rest of the Pennants are coming over then. You are getting rather old now," she stated, glancing at her daughter. "You 're nearly as tall as I am."

"I don't feel old," said Joy, truthfully; "I think it 's only my legs."

"I dare say it is," Mrs. Featherstone agreed. "Still, I think at fourteen I told Margaret she must stop kissing boys and men except her father and brothers, and I suppose you had better do the same. Nicolas is eighteen now, is n't he?"

"Yes, he 's something awful at Winchester which sounds like 'preposterous,' but means you can do as you like," said Joy. "He 's going back to-morrow because his broken collar-bone 's all right. I 'm afraid he won't like my not kissing him when he gives me Ajax. Still, I can kiss Ajax instead, can't I?"

"You can kiss bull pups as much as you like,"

said Mrs. Featherstone, gravely. "Nicolas will have to put up with that as a proxy."

"Mummy," Joy asked thoughtfully, "are men very different from women?"

Mrs. Featherstone looked very hard at Fidget's bridle before she answered, then she said slowly:

"Not particularly; a wise woman once said the older she grew the more sure she felt that there were only two kinds of people, men and women, and that they were very much alike. Still, there are certain differences. Women have to remember one or two things in their behavior to men. They must never allow any liberties to be taken with them, and they must not encourage men whom they do not wish to marry. Admiration is very nice, but it would not be very fair to accept a great deal of it unless you were prepared to give something back. Above all, they must play the game with other women. I think the basest thing a woman can do is to take away another woman's man."

"But they can't when they're married, can they?" Joy asked.

"Not without sin," said Mrs. Featherstone, sternly.

"I don't think I shall ever marry," said Joy,

standing on one slim foot and twirling slowly round on it. "I think I shall keep children, chickens, and a bulldog."

Mrs. Featherstone put down the bridle with a sigh, which might have been relief at her daughter's untouched innocence or despair at the failure of experience to reach the consciousness of youth.

"I wonder if you would like to be confirmed this year," she suggested, giving up the problems of this world to touch upon the lighter ones of the next. "You may wait until you are fifteen if you prefer to wait. You know what confirmation means, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Joy, lightly—"going to the other service and being able to be a godmother. I should like to be nearly everybody's godmother in Lynton. I don't think I need wait till I 'm fifteen, do you?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Featherstone, thoughtfully. "Confirmation means strengthening. I suppose you are ready to be confirmed when you wish very heartily to have your religion strengthened and are prepared to do your best to strengthen it. You do wish that, don't you?"

Joy stopped twirling, and opened Fidget's loose-

box. She had found a carrot on the harness-board and gave it to Fidget.

Fidget tossed her head as if alarmed, pretending that she had never seen a carrot before and believed it to be poisonous; but at last she took it with extreme caution and munched it with delicate precision; then she rested her wet mouth affectionately on Joy's shoulder.

Joy had a curious feeling rather like Fidget's about the carrot. Did she really want religion? Might n't it be embarking on something which would prevent the taste of something else? But, like Fidget, in the end she took the carrot. After all, she had always liked what she knew of God, and why should n't she like even more what she did n't know? Presumably, religion was that which taught you more.

"There is the breakfast-bell," said Mrs. Featherstone. "Shut the loose-box door carefully, and wash your hands. You can certainly be confirmed at the next confirmation if you like." This was all the advice that Mrs. Featherstone gave her daughter to fortify her to meet the problems of this life and the next.

III

THEY were all assembled about the door to see Joy mount Fidget. Nicolas, with Ajax crammed in a bag under one arm, had ridden Moonlighter over with some difficulty, and deposited Ajax, who was half suffocated with what he had succeeded in biting out of the bag, at her feet.

"O Nicolas!" she gasped, "how angelic of you! I must n't kiss you, because I 'm fourteen, but I can kiss Ajax. Is n't he too heavenly?"

"Oh, I see," said Nicolas, drawing back against Moonlighter and turning rather red and stiff.

Joy knew by his voice that he had n't liked it. She had guessed he would not, and hiding Ajax in a cloud of her long hair, she kept her face away from Nicolas so that she should n't see how much he minded. Nicolas never liked any one's seeing that he minded; and then she heard Maude say:

"But you can still kiss me, Nicolas."

A moment's comfort seized Joy's heart. Would n't this friendly substitution do? She looked up quickly, and saw that it had n't.

Nicolas bent his head politely, and went through the form of kissing the cheek forced upon his reluctant notice; but his gray eyes looked very cold, and his whole expression resembled Jacob's when, "Lo! in the morning he found it was Leah."

"Come here, and I'll put you up," he said shortly to Joy.

She pressed Ajax into Archie's willing arms, embraced her mother, and met her father's eyes, which appeared as usual to have seen something wrong and to be reserving it for future censure. He never had things out with them at the time, as their mother did. Then she slipped her slim foot into Nicolas's hand and sprang up to Fidget's back.

It was a perilous and delicious height. Riding Fidget was utterly unlike riding the children's two ponies, Catch-Me and Merryweather; they were quick goers, with the perverse and mischievous pony hearts, hard mouths and unresponsive intelligence.

Fidget was like having all your own nerves under you, and somebody else's as well. Her paces were easy and intelligent, her response like lightning. She recognized immediately that the light figure on her back had the hands and seat of

a born rider, and would give her the sympathy she needed.

She danced about a little in the drive, hunched her back, and sidled like a crab, and then, tossing her head, set out down the dangerous path as carefully as if she were walking on a tight rope.

Mrs. Featherstone looked on with assured and confident eyes. Then she moved quickly to Moonlighter's side and said in an undertone, "Take care of her, Nicolas." Aloud she said, "You 'll be back to tea at five o'clock sharp."

Nicolas touched his hat and nodded. He knew what she meant, and he forgave her what he had to forgive her for the sake of her trust in him.

"Really, my dear," said Mr. Featherstone, coldly, "I should have thought that even you would have noticed that young Pennant is no longer a child. I very much dislike to see a big girl like Joy riding about the country alone with him. It looks bad, very bad indeed, and is enough to start a scandal. Besides, I 'm not sure that it 's even safe."

"Oh, Fidget's perfectly safe," said Mrs. Featherstone; "Joy knows how to ride."

"I was n't referring to the horse," said Mr.

Featherstone, "but to the young man. You might at least have sent a groom with them."

"She 's all right with Nicolas," said Mrs. Featherstone, thoughtfully. "But I 'm not at all sure that Nicolas is all right with her. However, poor boy, a groom could hardly remedy that state of things."

Mr. Featherstone's eyebrows shot up into his hair with annoyance.

"What an extraordinary assertion to make, Angelica!" he said coldly. "But if you have brought Joy up to be forward, I cannot say that I feel at all surprised. One thing I must insist upon, however. These unchaperoned rides must not continue."

"They won't," replied Mrs. Featherstone; "Nicolas goes back to Winchester to-morrow."

Mr. Featherstone frowned heavily and backed into the house. He could find no fault with his wife's acquiescence in his orders, and yet as usual she had evaded the spirit of them. It was as if her submission was accidental, and might at any time spring away from him like the rebellious branches of a tree.

It was a wonderful ride. They went down and down into the depths of Lynmouth, and across the

foaming torrent which rages through the main street of the village, and then they climbed up out of it, on to the top of the world.

As far as the eye could see the moor stretched before them, broad and rimless, into the high, clear sky. The gorse-bushes ran here and there like spilt gold.

Moonlighter was a powerful black horse; he suited his paces to Fidget's with gentlemanly consideration. He knew better than to disobey the will that was on his back.

Neither Nicolas nor Joy talked very much at first. Nicolas was thinking hard of what he meant to say to Joy and of what he intended *not* to say to her; and Joy was alive in a world of her own. She felt very grown up because she was on Fidget's back, and yet she did not want to be any more grown up than that. She wanted not to give up her earlier consciousness.

It was joy enough to share the life of the climbing hedges, to pick out the giant foxgloves in lonely corners, to watch for the honeysuckle, flung like a network of embroidery over the tops of the low walls, or to surprise a flock of pink ragged-robins in a ditch, side by side with low forget-me-nots. She feared that something would interrupt.

her dreaming, because Nicolas was so very silent and sat so stern and still on his big horse, as if there was a storm in his mind. Nicolas was always very still in a storm; you hardly knew that he was fighting until he had finished fighting.

She glanced at him from time to time, and thought how old and handsome he was. His well-knit, erect figure was so like what Nicolas was inside, as straight as a die and as hard and unbreakable as a sycamore. His gray eyes, under thick, fair brows, had the sparkling fighter's spirit in them; his mouth, well shaped and a little too thin, was the mouth of a boy who had learned very early how to control himself and others.

He could be very gentle when he felt deeply and very implacable when he did not feel. Few people touched his heart, and nobody but Joy had ever touched his imagination.

Nicolas would have been a romantic figure to Joy if she had not known him so well. She thought of this as she glanced at him, and knew that, after all, he was only Nicolas.

He was the sharer of a hundred childish adventures; she had seen him naughty and punished, dirty and red with temper, and the picture of dejection and cleanliness in church on Sundays. He

was just the same as when they had been cut off by the tide, when she was eight and he was twelve, and he had not told her about it, but made her race with him across the dwindling sands, and she had thought he was so unkind to make her run when she was tired. He had forced her on against her will, but without panic, until they reached the dangerous corner, when she saw the waves running closer and closer to the cliff's-edge; and then he had lifted her in his arms and staggered through them into safety, and only for that minute, when the cold water struck and dragged at them, had he let her know, because he could n't help it, that there was any danger.

He had got much older suddenly while he was away at school, and his voice had changed; but Nicolas had n't changed. He had n't, perhaps, changed enough.

When they got on to the moors, Fidget and Moonlighter sniffed the keen and eager air, and thrilled to meet it. It became difficult, and then impossible, to hold them in; they let themselves out on the grass, galloping with stretched necks and flying hoofs. The sharp air ran through them and over them, till their riders felt like runaway giants. The horses raced side by side

with the wind, the soft turf vanishing under them, and the open moor before them.

It was a swift, enchanting hour. Nicolas never forgot it; it was his most perfect moment of human happiness. Everything he wanted was near him and still attainable, with his own will and hand to guide it.

Joy did n't think about happiness. She let her spirit out on the back of speed. No emotion shadowed her free, untroubled consciousness. She thought of nothing but the air and their passage through it. Now at last she knew what it felt like to be a bird. Fidget moved under her as easy and swift as wings. The air sang in her ears and whipped against her cheeks. She wanted to go on forever and to forget that she was ever human and a girl; and Nicolas stopped her.

"It 's time we pulled up," he shouted; "there are rabbit-holes."

She looked at him reproachfully. Of course it was perfectly true that there were rabbit-holes, and they pulled up.

"Jolly, was n't it?" said Nicolas. He was smiling now. The gallop had disposed of his temper; at least Joy thought it was the gallop. She

did not know it was her face. Nicolas let his eyes rest on her with brotherly approval.

"You ride Fidget well," he said. Behind his brotherly approval and scant praise his heart was at her feet.

It amazed and delighted him to watch her untroubled beauty. The hair that hung below her waist was the color of ripe corn, her eyes, beautifully set with chiseled lids, were of the deep, unshadowed blue of a gentian; her lashes were long and very dark, and her level, thin, black eyebrows made her skin look as white and soft as a cloud. Her features were small and delicately finished; a dimple came and went at the corner of her red, tip-tilted lips; her chin was a little pointed and had an eager air. But behind her beauty, giving it a life that no mere loveliness of line and color could give, was the gentleness of her heart.

There was neither pride nor tyranny in those soft eyes and curving lips; only a deep sincerity and an immense well of eagerness to love and to be loved.

Nicolas was not a poetic person, but as he looked at her he remembered a line of a poem which seemed descriptive of Joy,

A heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathise.

Joy had that leisure.

Nicolas knew that it was the rarest thing in the world to find beauty without vanity, charm without selfishness, a being so lovable and yet so humble in its loving, and he longed passionately for Joy to remain what she was, not to be spoilt by undiscriminating praise or blunted by adoration, even his own adoration; and above all he did not mean to take advantage of the fact that whatever you asked of Joy she gave.

"This is the Doone Inn above the valley," he said rather drily, turning Moonlighter's head toward a rough grass path. "We 'd better leave the horses here and lunch. It 's too rough a road to take them down the valley."

The Doone Inn was a low, gray house set four square on the moor, close to a water-course. A fringe of thin trees did very little to shelter it in the winter from the roaring moor winds, and the hills above it shut out the light of the sun.

But in summer it was a green and fragrant spot, moss-covered and shady, with the tinkling of water always in the air, and above it the shadows racing over the purple hills.

Nicolas lifted Joy off Fidget and took both horses away to look after them himself, while

Joy made friends with the landlady over a string of yellow ducklings.

Featherstone and Pennant were familiar names to Mrs. Palmer. She gave them the best she had and spoke to them in the high, soft Devon drawl, affectionately and at length. It puzzled Joy a little because she spoke as if they were older and belonged to each other; but fortunately Nicolas, though he got very red, did n't seem to mind.

When Mrs. Palmer had left them to themselves, they had bacon and eggs, fruit and clotted cream, saffron cakes, and home-made cider, and survived it. Nicolas told her all sorts of interesting things he must have found out on purpose—real historic stories of the Doones and their dark doings.

"I wish there were some of them left," Joy said with a little sigh when he had finished.

"Why do you?" asked Nicolas. "They had bad blood and were the terror of the countryside. Men like that should be stamped out. That 's why I want to be a soldier, because you know *how* to stamp out a pest then. Do you know, Joy, I believe you like people better when they 're wicked. Do you? It 's most unfair if you do."

Joy paused reflectively over her dancing yellow

cider. Nicolas was good. He would never be anything else but good. Conscientious, honest as daylight, and self-controlled, he could n't have broken any law that he did n't think worth breaking for a higher one, and he had no pity on sinners or on weaklings. He had never in his life said that he did n't mean to do what he had done.

That was it, perhaps: he had no pity. Joy could n't help liking the sinners for whom Nicolas had no pity.

"I don't think I like them because they 're bad," she explained; "only, if they 're bad, you see, it's very dreadful for them—is n't it?—and cuts them off everything that 's nice. They 're outlaws and have n't any real homes, and people don't love them; so you 're sorry for them, are n't you? Sorrier than if they 'd just been happy and good; and I suppose being sorry, Nicolas, makes you fonder of them somehow, does n't it?"

"It does n't seem quite fair to me," said Nicolas, flushing a little, "to care more for people who have made a hideous mess of things than for those who have n't."

Joy sighed a little. She could n't explain exactly what she meant. The father of the prodigal son must have experienced the same difficulty

when the righteous home-staying son objected to the fatted calf.

"If you 're noble," she said consideringly, "you 've got everything; and if you are n't noble,

"'But, Nick, you know I like you, awfully, even though you are good'"

you 're ashamed and have n't got anything, either. It must be so awful to be ashamed."

"Knowing you 're straight is n't everything," said Nicolas, stubbornly; "a man wants more than

that." He sounded somehow as if he had been very much hurt. Joy stretched her hand out to him and laid it close to his arm, on the table.

"But, Nick, you know I like you, awfully, even though you are good," she whispered, her eyes filling with tears. It was dreadful, suddenly in the midst of cider and Devonshire cream, on her birthday, to discover that Nicolas was unhappy and that she had made him unhappy, though she did n't know why.

Nicolas did not touch her hand; he took his arm off the table resolutely, and stuck his hands into his pockets, but not as if he wanted to quarrel.

"Oh, I know," he said quickly—"I know it 's quite all right, old girl. I think we 'd better be moving." Only it took almost five minutes before it was all right, and even then it was different.

They went to see if the horses were getting on well with their food, and crossed the stream by stepping-stones. Nicolas took her hand now, of his own accord, to help her over the stream, but dropped it quickly on the other side.

He began to tell her all about his school. It was a great compliment to Joy, for Nicolas never breathed a word of his school-life at home or to any one else. His life might have been cut off

short as he shut the garden-gate to go to the station, and only resumed when he opened it on his return for the holidays. It was very interesting, of course, but it was n't exactly what Joy wanted. She would have liked best to go back into the child world and talk about romance and Doones and things that never happened. Nicolas was making her feel grown up again, and as if she were riding Fidget high up over every one's heads.

She wanted to be a child with a free consciousness, but Nicolas would not let her be a child. He dragged her into his responsible world, where she found herself forced to be his equal, and share his difficulties and discoveries.

He was the head of his house. Prime ministers may sometimes feel important, but never as important as Nicolas. They cannot believe their mistakes to be so irretrievable, or their efforts so instinct with the very wind of fate. They are not young enough to be sure they are indispensable.

Nicolas described his house master to Joy. He was anxious that she should make no mistake about his house master, and not think he was silly about him or thought him a hero. Still, that was what he did think him.

They both wanted the same things. They

wanted a house they could be proud of, not particularly a "swotter's house" ("swotting" was working hard at books, Nicolas explained), nor even a house that carried off all the school honors at games, although games were tremendously important; but a decent house, a house they could depend on, without a rotten spot.

Nicolas spoke mysteriously to Joy about a thing called "tone." Tone was what they wanted most; Nicolas had fought for that thing called "tone," fought hard, and for years against great obstacles, and then they 'd got it. They really *had* got it. "It was a decent house," Nicolas explained. "I 'd have liked you to know any of our chaps," and then suddenly they lost it.

A fellow with a great deal of influence and popularity, awfully good at games, did n't care a hang about "tone"; he was no end of a slacker and so clever they could n't get hold of anything against him. Yet they knew. They knew he was going through the house like poison, like rat poison, undermining its "tone," and if they could only spot him breaking any twopenny-ha'penny rule, the house master could sack him on the spot, and then they 'd be safe again, and Nicolas could go off to Sandhurst with a quiet mind.

"But *he* would n't be safe," said Joy, stopping short in the precipitous downward path that looked over the Doone Valley, purple and dark and deep beneath them, "O Nicolas, think if he were expelled, how awful it would be for him!"

"It would n't matter a curse about him," said Nicolas, grimly. "Rotters don't count. It would be a jolly good thing all round. You don't understand."

"I could, if you explained," cried Joy. But Nicolas shook his head; he either could n't or would n't explain. He only said darkly:

"Well, I'll find him out one of these days, and then we 'll see. I 'm not going to have my house mucked up because of him."

Joy tried to resign herself to Nicolas's righteousness, backed by that of his house master; but her mind clung obstinately to the lost sheep, and left the ninety and nine just persons to shift for themselves.

"What 's his name, Nicolas?" she asked aloud. She remembered that Lord Tennyson had remarked, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," and it occurred to her that the salvation of this unfortunately black sheep might be one of them.

Nicolas would not like her to pray for him, but if she knew his name, she could pray for him without Nicolas being put to the trouble of knowing anything about it.

But Nicolas said abruptly:

"Its precipitous sides leaned over them dark and formidable"

"Oh, I could n't tell you his name, of course; that would be giving him away."

"But I shall never meet him," Joy explained.

"You might," replied Nicolas, and he added under his breath, "but I hope to God you never will!"

They stood now in the wildest part of the Doone Valley; its precipitous sides leaned over them dark and formidable even on a summer's day.

Joy pictured to herself the frozen winter and *John Ridd* flying over the mountains on his skees to rescue *Lorna,* starved and freezing in the valley. *John Ridd* was enormously big and strong and very kind except, of course, to Doones. It seemed as if very strong men had to be unkind to somebody. Joy sank down upon a patch of heather and did not want to talk or think of any one but Doones.

Nicolas lay at her feet, turning a little swath of grass into a ring. He had very neat, quick fingers.

"Look here," he said after a long pause, "will you promise me something, Joy?"

"Anything?" asked Joy.

"Well, I could hardly ask you that," said Nicolas in a low voice, his eyes bent on the ring. "That

would n't be fair, would it, to make you promise in the dark? I 'll tell you what it is first. You won't mind my asking you, will you?"

He spoke with unaccustomed diffidence, which made Joy feel as if she were nearly a hundred years old.

"No," she said, wondering what it could possibly be. "I don't think you would ask me what I 'd mind, Nick."

He drew a quick breath before he spoke, as if what she said had either pleased him very much or hurt him very much, she was n't quite sure which.

"Then," he said, flushing deeply, and keeping his eyes still carefully turned away from her face, "if I 'm not to kiss you again, will you promise me that you won't let any one else kiss you?"

It was such a curious question that Joy kept quite still for a moment, thinking it over. It was very odd that on her fourteenth birthday kisses should assume so tremendous an importance.

"Do you mean never in the world?" she asked anxiously.

Nicolas smiled a little, a very tender smile that made him look gentler than she had ever seen him look, except when he was playing with Rosemary.

"I should like that, I 'm afraid," he said; "but I 'm not going to ask it. What I want to ask is, that you won't let any one else till I get back from India. If I have any luck, I 'll pass for Sandhurst this summer, spend a year there, and three in India. That will be four years, Joy. Could you, do you think, promise for four years?"

"You don't mean uncles or the boys, do you?" Joy asked conscientiously. Mother had said she was to kiss the boys; but Nicolas might be more particular even than mother.

"No, I don't mind relations," said Nicolas, with the little smile again, "only no one else. Promise?"

"I promise," said Joy, quietly.

Then Nicolas looked at her. It was a long, tender, searching look, scrupulously unpassionate, as if he were taking her face into his heart and keeping it there forever.

The curious part of it was that though he looked away and began talking of nothing in particular directly afterward, it seemed to Joy that no matter how hard she tried after that, she could n't feel quite like a little girl again.

Nicolas had dropped the grass ring he was making, near her on the ground, and though Joy

looked at it and saw that it was finished, she did not pick it up; and as for Nicolas, although he had taken such pains with it, he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

They went all over the valley, and found traces of old and crumbled houses. Nicolas remembered fresh and awful tales of robbers and revenges till it was time to go home. They talked a great deal about *Lorna Doone,* but Nicolas said that he preferred fair heroines himself, and that in general he thought all the girls in books were beasts.

They found the horses fresh and ready for a start, and Mrs. Palmer gave them the heartiest farewell, and wished them unitedly a long life and a future like a summer's day, and Nicolas shook hands with her and thanked her.

Then they rode off till they came to the turf, and galloped a splendid, breathless gallop again. Only Joy did n't like it so much as she had in the morning; it seemed somehow less visionary and more as if they belonged to the earth.

They arrived home exactly at five o'clock. Joy had never had to think of the time at all; she knew Nicolas would remember.

All the other Pennants were there, with Julia, whom Joy adored. Julia was seventeen and really

grown up, but she could run like a hare and had no nonsense about her, though she was said to be the prettiest girl in Devon.

Ajax had behaved extremely well, and knew her again, or appeared to, when Joy knelt before him on the floor.

Rosemary flung her arms round Joy's neck and half strangled her with welcome.

There was a huge birthday cake, with fourteen ridiculous pink candles on it, and Nicolas put one in his pocket, because he said you never knew when a candle would n't come in handy.

It was a most successful tea party, and even after the Pennants had gone home the birthday was n't over.

Joy was to go down to dinner for the first time. It was ten o'clock before she went to bed. Maude was already asleep.

Joy had asked if Maude might n't come down to dinner, too, and when mother had said "Yes," and even father had agreed that she might if it was understood that it was n't to start a precedent, Maude said she would n't come down, after all. However, she agreed to eat Joy's dessert if it was brought up to her afterward; and she had eaten it.

Mrs. Featherstone came in when Joy was in bed, and the candle out. A big full moon like a silver lamp was climbing above the Rock and pouring light over the little bare room.

"You 're a happy girl?" Mrs. Featherstone

"She sat on the edge of Joy's bed"

asked as she bent over Joy. She did not usually ask such intimate personal questions.

"Yes," said Joy; "only, Mummy, I don't feel *exactly* the way I did."

"Don't you, darling?" asked Mrs. Featherstone. She sat on the edge of Joy's bed as if this was rather important. "What has made you feel different?"

"I don't know," said Joy. "P'raps it was dinner down-stairs and being fourteen; p'raps—" Joy paused. It suddenly occurred to her that perhaps it was not kissing Nicolas, and the curious part of it was that she found she did n't want to say anything more about Nicolas, even to her mother. She found herself saying instead something quite different.

"And, Mummy, p'raps," she said, "I really *am* old enough to be confirmed now."

IV

FOUR years pass quickly to country people in a country place. A storm, a drought, a shipwreck, or a drunken blunder, assuming the importance of crime, stands out with a vividness unknown to places where the traffic is great and the landmarks few.

Joy turned from childhood to womanhood with no outward event to crystallize her consciousness. Her dresses became a little longer, and one day when she put her hair up for fun, twisting it into two thick plaits around her head, her mother suggested that she should keep it up. Lessons dwindled into classes, but there was never any lack of things for Joy to do. The boys came home for holidays, the horses and dogs had to be exercised daily, her mother liked occasional help in the house, and there was always the village.

Rock Lodge did not "run the village," because the village would never have dreamed of running; it moved, if it moved at all, with a quiet gait pe-

culiarly its own, and Rock Lodge moved beside it, and helped backward persons over stiles.

Maude sometimes complained that they had no neighborhood; she needed more tennis in the summer and more dancing in the winter. But, then, Maude had a naturally indolent nature; she wished to do what there was not, because she did not wish to do what there was. She had to be taken out of herself by the strenuous efforts of others, and never found her time filled to the brim by any such altruistic intentions in herself.

There was only one employment to which Maude would willingly have applied both her time and her strength; she could have entertained young men. But there were very few men of the necessary type to be found in Lynton, and when Joy was there, they seemed to wish their entertainment to come from her. Maude was perfectly loyal to Joy, and she knew that her sister did not purposely attract young men; on the contrary, Joy preferred Rosemary and the moors.

But men seldom study the preferences of women; they study their own. "If only Joy would marry young, like Margaret," Maude thought to herself, "sensibly and go away, I should have heaps of fun; but I suppose she's waiting till Nico-

las comes back." And Maude sighed. She herself would have liked to wait till Nicolas came back.

But Joy was n't waiting for Nicolas. She would be glad when he came back, and she knew that he belonged to her; but she had never felt in any sense that she belonged to him. What did not belong to her mother and to Rosemary belonged to her. A great deal of Joy belonged to Rosemary because Rosemary needed Joy's love.

Mrs. Featherstone had a curious coldness of feeling toward her youngest child. She would n't have owned that she did n't love Rosemary as well as any of the others, but she was accustomed to sound, strong children, rosy and solid, with straight backs and beautiful, sturdy limbs. This flabby little creature, who cried much of its time and betrayed a despicable tendency to rickets, irritated her pride.

Rosemary had n't steady nerves, and when she grew older, she did n't stop crying. She was pretty in a frail and fluctuating way, but she did n't eat quantities of bread and butter and look one straight between the eyes. Nothing could induce her to ride, even the mildest and broadest of Exmoor ponies. She screamed so shrilly and vio-

lently that she had to be removed from its back. She was punished, of course (to Mrs. Featherstone there was something indecent in the idea that any child of hers should not be able to ride), but though Rosemary shrank under the punishment, she repeated the offense. It was very dreadful to be conquered by the screams of a naughty child, but riding had to be given up.

Mrs. Featherstone often had to give up making Rosemary do what she would have made any of the other children do, not because the child's will was strong, but because it was so weak that it broke in the effort to obey. Mrs. Featherstone was neither cruel nor tyrannical, but she was not adaptable, and when she found that her ordinarily successful methods of bringing children up failed with Rosemary, she half unconsciously avoided her, and more and more handed the child over to Joy.

Joy could manage Rosemary. Tears stopped, and a thousand pretty graces, hidden by fright, came out in Rosemary when she was left to Joy. Joy taught her, and she learned swiftly; played with her, and she grew braver over her play; loved her, and in return received the child's passionate adoration.

But not even Joy could supply Rosemary with the armor necessary against the clumsiness of life. She was too sensitive, too intense a child. The flame of her little spirit shot up beyond the power of her frail outer being to control it. Fear tor-

"But Rosemary did recover from the measles"

mented and devoured her; even love was as sharp to her as the edge of a knife. Pleasure brought tears of troubled ecstasy to her eyes, and pain demoralized her.

There was no padding between her raw nerves and a family which Mrs. Featherstone had brought up on the simple principles that they were never to make a fuss and never to tell a lie.

Mercifully, there had always been Patch, who took a less definite view of morality, and Joy, who never seemed to find morality get in her way at all.

Joy never remembered when it was that she first felt anxious about Rosemary's health. Rosemary took longer, Mrs. Featherstone asserted, than she ought over the measles, and Patch explained to Joy afterward that if Mrs. Featherstone had n't said one could n't be very ill with measles, she would have thought Miss Rosemary was very ill. But Rosemary did recover from the measles, to pass a weak and querulous summer; it was only when the winter came again that Joy wondered how many colds it was perfectly natural for a little girl to have, and when she speculated out loud, not to her mother, but to Patch, she discovered with an access of alarm that Patch was anxious, too.

Patch was sewing in the nursery when Joy opened the question. There was still a nursery, though Rosemary was nine years old. Institutions like nurseries lingered on in Rock Lodge, slipping gradually from one use to another. Patch would always be there and she would always be called "Nurse," even though she had no nurs-

ling left, and acted as the family sewing maid.

When Joy said, "Nurse, I think Rosemary is getting very thin," Nurse did not say, "Chickens is thin when they lose their fluff," as Joy had half expected; she bit violently at her cotton and said thoughtfully, "Her li'l' clothes du hang round her sure-lye."

"Patch was sewing in the nursery when Joy opened the question"

"Yes," agreed Joy, reluctantly, "and she says she has pains all over her, and gets so flushed in the evenings. You don't think there 's anything really *wrong,* do you, Nannie?"

Patch looked at her with troubled eyes.

"I don't like it, Miss Joy dear," she said at last. "It 's been on the tip of my tongue to tell 'ee that

times without number, but my 'eart failed me. The child eats less nor a bird, and at night I du hear her cry out in her sleep, and there 's times when, late as the night may be, the child is n't asleep."

Joy rose with a quick movement of her shoulders.

"Something must be done about it, then, at once," she said with the relief of youth in action. "I shall get Dr. Armstrong to see her."

Patch did not share her quick relief.

"It might be well, could 'ee get mistress to do that," she agreed, but she sighed when Joy ran out of the room on her errand. She was an old woman, and she knew that you cannot stop everything, no matter how quickly you run to do it.

There is a natural antagonism in the sanest hearts against the portents of disaster. They will admit that accidents happen, but they will not go out to meet them. Mrs. Featherstone resisted Joy's anxiety with something very like anger. She did not love Rosemary enough to notice that she was thinner, but she loved Joy enough to see that Joy noticed it and could not stop noticing it.

Joy pressed the need of advice upon her mother with an unfaltering persistence; she followed her

about like a dog from the harness-room to the pantry. Mrs. Featherstone listened to her with compressed lips and quiet disapproval. At last, rather surprisingly to Joy, she yielded.

"You may do as you wish," she said, "and send for Dr. Armstrong. I think you are mistaken, but, after all, if you are not, my mistake would be the worst disaster of the two. Remember, though, that if Dr. Armstrong agrees with me, there must be no more fussing. It is very silly and bad taste to think so much about health. When I was young, if I said that I was ill, I was told that I might go to bed if I liked, but that I should be given nothing to eat until I got up and came down-stairs. I always recovered promptly."

At first Dr. Armstrong seemed to share Mrs. Featherstone's light diagnosis; he could n't find anything wrong with the child. But though he said this at once and sent Rosemary out into the garden to play, he asked Patch a great many questions. Joy and Patch were alone with him, for Mrs. Featherstone had remarked that she was not going to have anything to do with so silly a business. When Patch had told him all she could, he met Joy's anxious eyes consideringly. "No," he said gravely, "I can't honestly say that I am

satisfied about the child. I don't know that anything is the matter, but I suspect it. Children have tricky constitutions. I 'd be better pleased if your parents would let some big man come down from Exeter and take a look at her. There 's Eames, a first-rate fellow and a children's specialist. I should like Eames to see her."

It took a load off Joy's mind to know that there was Eames. Dr. Armstrong was good; he had brought them all into the world and was to be depended on for their brief and easy ailments: but Joy had already gone so far along the road of suspense as to admit to herself that Rosemary's trouble was not likely to be brief or easy.

Joy found her mother more inclined to accept the need of a second opinion than Mr. Featherstone. Mr. Featherstone said that he was surprised and shocked with Joy for making such a suggestion. Modern life was perfectly lawless; it had become like a jungle. It was not probable that Mr. Featherstone was intimately acquainted with jungles, as he had lived his entire life in Devonshire, which is not a close parallel to the tropics; but "jungle" has an unhallowed sound, and Joy's urgency appeared to her father to tamper with his prerogative as a parent. If there

was to be any anxiety, it should be his; and he was not yet anxious.

Mrs. Featherstone answered him with her usual studied patience.

"We had better see this thing through now," she said. "One swallow does not make a summer, nor need two doctors imply a serious disease. Pray let us drop the subject until there is something definite to be faced."

It comforted Joy to hear her mother dismiss anxiety. Her mother was so often right, and so long as all the safe things were going to be done, it was reassuring to be told that they were not necessary.

Dr. Eames arrived on a cold, gray day. The light from the sea was pale and fixed. There was neither movement nor promise in the still and bitter air; the kind and fruitful earth was held lifeless and as hard as stone in the grip of frost.

The two doctors found Joy playing dolls with Rosemary before the nursery fire. Dr. Eames was clever with children, and understood the way to handle dolls. Joy's heart beat up in her throat while this formidable man went on his knees beside the dolls' house and made suggestions about real coal being put in the dolls' fireplace.

Suddenly she understood that there were dreadful things which might happen, even if all the proper things were done at the proper times. But she kept her eyes unafraid and her hands from

"Dr. Eames stethoscoped first the dolls and then Rosemary"

trembling. She entered with apparent lightheartedness into the game of a child's hospital, where Dr. Eames stethoscoped first the dolls and then Rosemary, to keep them, as he explained, up to the mark.

Dr. Armstrong stood over by the fireplace tapping the frost flowers on the glass. He had been a great deal in that nursery and he had a nursery of his own.

Rosemary looked several times at Joy to see if she could n't be frightened, but Joy had such quiet,

smiling eyes, and so evidently thought that they were having great fun, that Rosemary decided that nobody could be going to hurt her; and neither of the doctors did hurt her. Dr. Eames made her a red flower and a flower-pot out of some colored paper he found on the floor, and then went away into another room and did n't come back again, and Joy went on playing with her till Patch came up from her tea. Then she kissed the top of Rosemary's head rather hurriedly and ran down-stairs.

But when Joy was outside the dining-room door, where the doctors were, she pulled herself up short, as if she were driving in a narrow lane and had met something so large that there was not any room for her to pass it. Then she dragged herself into the dining-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone were with the doctors. Mrs. Featherstone sat in an arm-chair, but she was not leaning back; she sat very erect, and looked just as usual. Mr. Featherstone was leaning forward over the table, with his head buried in his hands. Dr. Eames stood in front of the fire, with his hands behind him, and Dr. Armstrong had gone back to the window again as if to see how the frost looked from down-stairs.

Joy found that her lips had grown difficult to move; they did n't tremble, but they seemed heavy, and she said, "What is it?" in a curious voice, and without realizing that it was too short a sentence to sound quite polite.

Dr. Eames looked sharply from her to her mother, and Mrs. Featherstone said:

"Yes, you may as well tell her. She 's old enough to know and she has always taken care of the child."

"I am not perfectly certain what is the matter with your sister," said Dr. Eames, "but I am inclined to think, and Armstrong here agrees with me, that she has a very obscure and rare disease. I need not bother you with its name, but it is not——" He paused a moment to choose his words, but Mrs. Featherstone chose them for him.

"It is not curable," she said firmly.

"Do you mean that she is going to die?" asked Joy. She felt as if her body was a wire string of a violin, so tightly strung that at a touch it would break; but she held her head up as her mother had always told her to do, and looked Dr. Eames straight in the face.

For a long moment no one spoke, but she saw

her father's shoulders heave. Then Dr. Eames said gently:

"I 'm afraid it 's not a recoverable disease. Armstrong will tell you all about it later. He knows the best treatment, and will carry it out for you. Nothing need be done to alarm the child. The best plan is to let her go on as long as possible as she is, not pressing her in any way."

"Will she suffer dreadfully?" asked Joy. Her heart was so exposed to pain that it demanded to know where it could safely rest, lest some deceitful mercy should lull it into false security, and pain, returning, destroy her unaware.

"I am afraid there will be suffering," said Dr. Eames after a pause, "but Armstrong will give her morphia when—she needs it."

"What is going to happen to her?" Joy asked desperately, looking from one to the other as if there must be some way of escape.

"Need we know any more?" Mrs. Featherstone asked quietly. "These details seem to me unnecessary. Dr. Eames has not even said that he is sure the disease has attacked the child. May we not all be conjuring up imaginary horrors?"

Neither of the two doctors answered this appeal. Joy looked at her mother. Her heart was

divided against itself; she wanted intensely to spare that inflexible figure any further pain. She was not deceived by Mrs. Featherstone's flawless self-control. She knew that her mother suffered as the unimaginative suffer, unpreventably and without the power to dodge a blow. But Rosemary, pitiful and small, caught at her heart for defense. Unless Joy knew exactly what the evil was, how could she spare Rosemary what might yet be spared her? She did not press her point any further, but her eyes went on with their relentless questions. Mrs. Featherstone gave a little gesture of defeat.

"Tell her," she said gently. "After all, she has a right to know; she will nurse the child."

"There won't be any difficulty about that," Dr. Eames said in a soothing voice. "It is not an infectious disease. In a household like yours it is virtually unknown; even in the hospitals it is extremely rare. I have only known two such cases in my whole career. It is one of the wasting diseases, Miss Featherstone, and in its later stages the bones pierce the skin. Death comes from exhaustion."

Mr. Featherstone said, "My God! my God!" into his handkerchief. Nobody else said anything.

Mrs. Featherstone sat without stirring, meeting Joy's eyes. They were terrible to meet, because they seemed to be accusing her; but Mrs. Featherstone knew that they were not accusing her: they were accusing a universe which can hold such secrets.

After a moment's intolerable silence Mrs. Featherstone motioned for Joy to ring for tea and began to speak with perfect composure upon impersonal subjects. The doctors responded to her with visible relief, and Joy found that it was a help to make these two men less uncomfortable. Doctors do not like giving death-sentences. The deeper agony of her parents was a thing she could deal with presently; it would last long enough. Only Mr. Featherstone refused to be deflected from his grief. He drank two cups of tea without a protest, but left the room abruptly when his wife handed him a buttered muffin. A wall was built up between them and their agony.

The doctors stayed for a quarter of an hour and went off cheerful and absolved. Joy and her mother were left face to face. Mrs. Featherstone longed to take Joy in her arms and comfort her, but she dared not move. Deep in her truthful heart she knew that though she felt bitter

remorse, she had no greater love for the little threatened life, and nothing but a love as great as her own would comfort Joy.

But Joy was not thinking of her comfort; she had not yet noticed her own pain. She saw her mother's, and Rosemary's was in her heart. She

"She dropped on her knees"

dropped on her knees, and with her arms around her mother she did the thing which she felt instinctively would help her most: she cried very softly, with her head against her mother's breast. They had this consolation: they were free together now in the center of their grief, and they knew

that they would neither leave it nor each other until the end.

The life in Rock Lodge went on as usual. Mr. Featherstone had a grief, which was at first painful and then became a luxury. Sorrow added to his importance and relieved him from a feeling he sometimes had, of having a grievance without sufficient form to attract sympathetic attention.

Maude cried violently for half an hour, and then kept away from Rosemary as much as possible. The boys were written to, and felt the sharp and easily driven-under sympathy of boys; and Patch and Joy settled into the habit of continuous nursing.

The disease was quick and relentless. There were a few soft February days when Rosemary fluttered feebly on the cliff's-edge with Joy, and found the first snowdrops under the shadow of the rocks; but when the March winds roared and the daffodils showed their gold hoods in sunny corners, Rosemary never left her bed in the night nursery. Patch slept beside her at night, and Joy was with her nearly all the long, bright days.

Pain came with the spring and the sunshine. It was not a bearable pain; it came swiftly and overwhelmingly, blotting out the sunlight, making life

ugly, and even love, though it was the one thing left worth having, sometimes a burden. There was neither interval nor horizon in her illness; and there seemed, above all, no mercy.

Joy's young and lovely face grew stern and colorless as she fought this strange enemy. She fought it desperately hour by hour with all the weapons of her young armory, courage and swiftness, patience and steadiness, the wings of imagination, and the unflinching sympathy of her single heart.

Dr. Armstrong came daily and gave her all the help he had. Occasionally, he suggested half-heartedly sending to Exeter for a trained nurse. But trained nurses were not common in the country-side, and he knew the child would have hated any substitute for her sister.

Joy never for a moment listened to any such idea. She loved the child; the child was therefore hers, and every hour and all her strength were Rosemary's. Very few people really bear other people's pain; they do not come within an instant's pang of it: but the few who do, bear more; they bear all the sufferer's pain and none of his alleviations. With undulled senses and sharpened nerves they drink the dregs of the cup;

and there is not one of them who drink it who does not pray that the cup may pass, and who does not know that it will not pass until it has been emptied.

Joy could not think of other things. Sometimes her mother forced her to go out. They told her Nicolas was coming back on leave, and they even wanted her to go with Maude to a garden party; but she only looked at them with eyes which hardly noticed they were there.

Nobody was real to Joy except Dr. Armstrong, Patch, and Rosemary; not even the dogs. She went for one hour's walk daily over the moors with Ajax trailing faithfully beside her, but she never saw him at other times.

Rosemary was frightened if the dogs came into the room; they might knock against the bed, and when any one touched the bed it made her scream with pain.

Sometimes she screamed even when she had not been touched. Her screams rang in Joy's ears long after they had stopped. She used to hear them in the night, and run and listen outside the nursery door, where there was only silence.

Dr. Armstrong had begun the morphia, but he

never let them give her enough. Joy had not thought of pain before. Old people in the village were sometimes ill, and soup and puddings went to them. The boys fell out of trees, broke small bones, which were easily set, and climbed back into the trees again. But now she knew that the universe had lied to her; it had told her to dance and sing when children could be tortured to death. She still trusted in God, and when she was n't amusing Rosemary, she prayed with a fierce and unrelenting passion. If anything could move the heavens, she would move them.

Joy always went to the early service every Sunday. It was a great help to her because she gave herself up then, and asked God to give her Rosemary's illness and spare Rosemary. Sometimes for five minutes she felt calm and happy, as if He had answered her and would really take her young body and break it and leave Rosemary free.

But it never happened. The calm was torn to shreds by the dreadfulness of her unblemished health. She was perfectly, unendurably well. She even ate and slept normally. And while Rosemary wasted away beneath the rod of pain, all the little flowers came out on the hillside and under the waterfalls. Primroses, pale and soft, like

Rosemary when she was well, the youngest and most innocent of all the flowers. In the woods the hart's-tongue ferns burned green and the bluebells made deep pools of azure underneath the trees.

Spring was beautiful and young; it set sharp teeth into Joy's heart. She could not bear the tender new-born leaves; the scent of a brier-rose came on her like a blow. The birds were worst of all, because even when they were quite young and unsteady on their wings they could fly away. And over and over again Joy whispered to herself as she watched their flight, "Oh, that she had wings like a dove, that she might flee away and be at rest!"

V

IT was very near the end now. Joy did not know how near, but she had stopped asking Dr. Armstrong any questions. She had a terror of leaving Rosemary's room. It was as if what she was afraid of waited for her outside the door. She was safe as long as she stayed inside with Rosemary; even Rosemary's pain seemed less while she ministered to it.

Joy felt it was as silly to ask her to come away and rest as if some one suggested reading out loud to her while she was in a runaway dog-cart, and when her mother told her that Nicolas was down-stairs in the drawing-room waiting to see her, she felt a sudden exasperation against Nicolas. He had had no business to come back to England just then and want to see her in the drawing-room.

When she opened the door she saw him standing by Maude, who was pouring out tea, and they were both laughing merrily. Joy did not blame Maude for this; she shielded Maude even from her own thoughts, but she blamed Nicolas. When

he looked up at Joy, he stopped laughing, and his face and voice grew very grave. He asked her at once how Rosemary was. It was right that it should be the first thing he said to her, but it was too close to that merry laughter for her really to answer him. She said quietly, almost indifferently, that Rosemary was just the same.

The room was full of people and merriment. Julia was there, and a strange man with her. Julia took Joy in her arms and held her close. Her eyes were wet, and she trembled as she held her. Joy could feel the thrill of her sympathy. Julia minded with a curious sharpness. She minded not because she had particularly liked Rosemary,—it was Nicolas whose favorite Rosemary had been,—but because the intensity of her own happiness made her for a moment understand pain.

Joy remembered in a dull way that some one had told her that Julia was engaged to be married, so that when Julia said, "This is Owen, Joy—Owen Ransome," Joy guessed this was the strange man who was going to marry Julia.

Owen Ransome was n't a bit like Nicolas. He was graceful and alert and quite peculiarly kind. He brought her tea and isolated Julia, Joy, and

himself from the rest of them. Country people are always a little awkward and even resentful of strangers when they meet them for the first time, but there was no awkwardness in Mr. Ransome. He seemed at once like an old friend. He talked a great deal more than any one Joy had ever met, but quietly and unaggressively, as if he were covering up something that might hurt if it were left uncovered.

Julia listened to him and looked happy all the time, but her happiness did not hurt Joy as Nicolas's laugh had hurt her; it pleased and comforted her very much. She would have liked to sit for a long time with those two happy people. She felt like a convalescent, aware of her own weakness, drinking in with gratitude the warmth and strength of the sun.

Nicolas came over to her and asked her in a low voice if she would n't come out and show him the waterfall. She wished he had stayed with Maude. They had a waterfall of their own in the High Meadow, above the Rock. He made the excuse that after five years in India a fellow had a hankering for waterfalls. It was n't a good excuse, because the High Waterfall was a trivial affair. If Nicolas had wanted to look at a water-

fall, Watersmeet, as he must have known, had a dozen very much grander ones. But although Nicolas always knew what he wanted, he was not very good at finding excuses for getting it.

Something or other happened when Nicolas came and stood behind her chair. Mr. Ransome looked at Nicolas, and Nicolas looked at Mr. Ransome, as if they did n't like each other. Joy knew Nicolas so well that she felt his dislike in the air. She did n't know Mr. Ransome, of course, and the quick glance he gave Nicolas might only have been surprise; but Julia flushed suddenly as if she felt it was n't only surprise.

Joy rose obediently and left the room with Nicolas. She did not want to go, and she felt vaguely hurt with Nicolas for taking her; but she knew that she had felt hurt lately for very slight causes. It was as if the power of pain in her heart drew against her all the little pricks and arrows of fortune. Pain had made her vulnerable to pain.

Nicolas was, as usual, extremely silent. He could n't make conversation, and he did n't try. He only walked along beside her, very big and brown, swinging his riding-cane in his hand and

trying not to stare at her. At last he said in a queer, moved voice:

"You know I 'm most dreadfully sorry, don't you?"

Joy stopped short; the color rushed to her face. He could say that and laugh—laugh not as people laugh who are forcing themselves to be polite, but with a spontaneous gaiety!

"You used to love Rosemary," she said harshly. "Do you want to see her now?"

It was n't a fair thing to ask, and she knew it was n't. How could he want to see the racked and tortured child? Nicolas was afraid of his own clumsiness. He had none of the neat adaptability of the self-assured. Joy was deliberately forcing him to fail her, and he did fail her. He stepped back and stammered. He showed her that he did n't want to see Rosemary.

"Might we see the waterfall first?" he asked humbly.

Joy looked at her watch.

"I have half an hour," she said drily.

She was singularly fair about the time. She might have given him only twenty minutes, but she would give him the ten extra reluctant minutes, since she was not prepared to give him anything

else. The grass was thick and wet. The little waterfall hung over them, a frail sheet of foam; at their feet was a rushing pool where the small, broken waves folded and intersected themselves, running back on their own swiftness. The pool was surrounded by thick-set mosses and long, green ferns. A tiny stream broke out of it, sparkling and brown, feeding the rich grass meadow.

Nicolas could remember when he and Joy had paddled in the stream, Joy obediently lending herself to his authority upon the habits of paper boats. There was an india-rubber doll, too, that she had sacrificed to leap the waterfall, but had afterward, its contortions being agonizingly lifelike, insisted on Nicolas wading into the depths of the pool to save. She had no memory to spare for these things now. She asked Nicolas perfunctory questions about his life in India. At first he answered her in monosyllables; then he stopped speaking altogether, and only looked at her.

"Joy," he said at last, "I 've come back, but I don't know where you are."

"Don't you?" she asked bitterly. "You might know, if you 're so dreadfully sorry."

"You won't let me come near you," he said humbly. "If I can't come near, you know I can't

tell you anything. I 'm too stupid. I 'm not like that glib fellow Ransome."

Joy moved farther away from him. She knew perfectly well that Nicolas had not meant physical nearness and that her action cut him to the quick. She knew that if only Nicolas would lose his temper with her she would feel a great deal better and probably be very kind to him, but Nicolas had a slow temper. He grew red under her treatment, but he did not lose his self-control.

"Why don't you like Mr. Ransome?" she asked coldly. "It must hurt Julia to have you so unfriendly."

"It 'll hurt Julia a damned sight more if she marries him," said Nicolas, fiercely.

"I suppose you learned to swear in India," she said stiffly.

"No, I did n't," said Nicolas, with a vexed laugh. "I learned to swear here about two minutes ago. Does every girl that man looks at lose her head about him?"

Joy had made him lose his temper at last, but it did n't improve matters. She was too indignant to speak.

"Nicolas!" she exclaimed. She did n't even re-

member what Mr. Ransome looked like, and how dared Nicolas think that she cared for any man's looks now?

She turned away, and began to walk back toward the house; but Nicolas's hand, which was as

" 'Joy,' he said at last, 'I've come back, but I don't know where you are' "

hard as iron, shot out and caught her by the wrist.

"Just one moment," he said quietly, letting it drop as soon as she had turned to face him. "I beg your pardon. I should n't have said that. But, Joy, when I was here before you used to let me tell you things, and you did n't think I was

all wrong before even I 'd got them off my chest."

Joy came back to him in a moment.

"O Nicolas," she said quickly, in quite a different voice, "are you unhappy, too?"

He looked at her with his queer eyes, which danced when they fought and danced when they were tender, but surely could n't dance if he was really unhappy, as they were dancing now.

"Where 's Ajax?" he asked her, instead of answering her question.

"Oh," said Joy, "did n't he come with us? I suppose I must have forgotten to let him out of the stable-yard."

"Look here," asked Nicolas, "are you going to forget everybody because they are n't ill?"

She took a quick breath as if he had struck her. It was unendurable of him to blame her now and to try to dissipate the awful concentration of her faculties. He wanted to interrupt her, and on her remaining free from interruption depended all her strength.

The worst of it was that Nicolas was real. She saw him not as she saw everybody else, as if they were figures moving about on a screen. Nicolas was as real as a burglar, and he broke into her privacy with just the same lawless force.

But she had a weapon against him, and since he had attacked her, she would use it. She could always hurt Nicolas a great deal more than Nicolas could hurt her.

"You are not really unhappy," she said, "and it is no use trying to make me listen to you now. I dare say we were a great deal to each other when we were young; I don't remember. But I am not like what I was then. Everything is different for me now. Maude belongs to that time still, and I expect you will find the boys just the same. Why don't you go to them? They 'd love to have you."

"Thank you," said Nicolas, "I dare say they would, but I don't belong to any time. I belong to you. I thought you knew that. You can shut me out, of course, but you can't prevent my staying exactly where you shut me. I 'll wait if I have to; but if you make me wait, not even you can stop my being unhappy."

It was one thing to make Nicolas angry, but it was quite another, a most dreadful thing to Joy, to make any one who belonged to her unhappy. She had struck too hard, and her weapon returned against herself. She hesitated on the brink of recantation, and then the clock in the

valley struck six. Joy started, and turned quickly away from him.

"Oh, I 'm late!" she cried, aghast. "Good-by."

She walked swiftly toward the house. Perhaps if Nicolas really liked waterfalls, he would stay and look at it. But he did n't stay; he swung along easily beside her in one of his companionable silences. When they reached the hall he said very gently, as if he had forgotten all about their angers:

"May I come up with you?"

She knew that she could n't bear him even to see Rosemary. She shook her head and ran upstairs without a word; but she could n't quite get rid of him even in Rosemary's room. Her heart misgave her for being unkind. She had never deliberately tried to hurt any one before. She remembered that she had n't even asked what he had on his mind about Mr. Ransome. It was very unlike Nicolas to say anything against another man. He was not by nature critical and he never accused without a cause. His worst complaints of men he disliked were, as a rule, that they were not his sort; but he obviously went further than this in his opposition to that peculiarly kind man, Mr. Ransome.

Rosemary was asleep. Mrs. Featherstone sat bolt upright in a chair beside her. The sun filled the night nursery and touched in turn all Rosemary's flowers. Joy had made a garden of her room, and sometimes Rosemary smiled at them, and sometimes she turned her face toward the wall, as if looking at the flowers hurt her.

Mrs. Featherstone kissed Joy tenderly, and Joy clung to her. She knew how much her mother cared. Mrs. Featherstone did not spend much of her time with Rosemary, because she still did not understand illness; but she understood nearly everything else. Her eyes rested on Joy questioningly for a moment, then she sighed, and kissed her again, before she slipped quietly out of the room. Joy was safe at last. She was close to the child, and there was nothing to disturb them. The blessed ease of the morphia wrapped the tiny slumbering form in peace.

Time moved imperceptibly. The rooks came home to the elms at the bottom of the garden, shaking the sky with their reverberating voices and the rocketing of their thick, black wings. A distant cuckoo held his evening song later than all the other singing birds. The light grew intense, and then slowly began to fade. Joy heard the

horses come up the drive to take the Pennants home. There was a soft sound at the door. For a moment her heart beat fast and angrily. Could it be Nicolas who had disobeyed her?

But Nicolas would not disobey her. It was only Julia, who came in and knelt beside the bed—Julia, with her beauty and her thrilling happiness, touched to the depth of her heart by little Rosemary. She knelt there, hardly daring to breathe for a long time, and then she buried her head in Joy's lap and shook with silent tears.

Joy bent her head and whispered reassurances and consolations to Julia. She wanted to make it easy for her to think of Rosemary, and for Nicolas she had wanted to make thinking of Rosemary hard.

"It is n't really so bad now," she whispered; "she does n't suffer so much. She 's not exactly better, but anything is better than pain."

Julia kissed Joy's hands, and then very tenderly kissed her face. The tears were running down Julia's cheeks, but Joy did n't cry.

"Oh, I want you to be happy," Julia whispered —"happy as I am happy! You *will!* You *will!* O Joy!" and Joy smiled a queer little wan smile in answer. She was wondering at the importance

people attached to happiness. It seemed to her like something that had happened to her a long time ago and which she had forgotten.

Then Julia left her, and it was only after the door had closed behind her that Joy realized Nicolas had come upstairs, too. He was standing just outside the door all the time.

VI

ROSEMARY'S illness had seemed so interminable that its swift conclusion, the brief few minutes of flurry at the end, was as startling as if there had been no preparations at all. Joy had gone to bed as usual, and toward dawn she was wakened suddenly by the massive presence of Patch whispering by her bedside as if she were afraid of being overheard.

"Oh, if you please, Miss Joy, there 's something happening to Miss Rosemary!"

In an instant Joy was flying down the passage, the sleep torn from her eyes and heart. As she reached the door she heard the loud cardiac breathing, which had come on in the last few days, louder than ever. The child was sitting up in bed; her eyes had a curious, restless expression. She seemed to be looking in turn at everything in the room, as if she was going away on a journey and wanted to remember her old possessions, which she must leave behind. Her eyes fell on Joy almost accusingly.

"I should like you to sing," she said clearly, with little pauses between the words, "'Three blind mice.'"

Joy knelt down beside the bed, slipping her arms under the huddled little form, and raised a quivering voice. The child's bandaged little hand waved flutteringly in time to the tune Joy sang:

"Three blind mice, see how they run!
They all ran after the farmer's wife;
She cut off their tails with a carving-knife.
Did you ever see such a thing in your life?
Three blind mice!"

"Oh, my dearie, would n't you like a nice little hymn instead?" urged Patch from her station behind the bed. But Rosemary did not seem to hear Patch; her mind was taken up with the absorbing occupation of her breathing. Rosemary murmured:

"Is the night coming or going away, Joy?" She was looking into the light of dawn, but her eyes were growing dim; she could no longer see the familiar things.

"It 's going," said Joy, breathlessly; "the night 's nearly gone, Rosemary."

The little life snapped softly like a worn thread; there was no struggle. A breath came and shook

her for a moment, and then passed with her beyond the reach of pain.

"O Miss Joy, Miss Joy!" sobbed Patch, "the blessed innocent is gone!"

Joy still held the child in her arms, but she was aware that the silence, which came from nowhere and filled the room, had robbed her.

"There, there, my dear, put her down! Put her down!" urged Patch. "You can't do no more for her now. You 've done all you could for her always, the praper lamb!"

Joy was quite submissive about it. She laid the little figure back on the pillow and walked to the open window. The garden was full of mist. A thick, white blanket lay over the valley and hid the waterfalls. On the little lawn streamers and folds of mist moved lightly in the dawn wind. The silly little tune repeated itself in Joy's mind:

Three blind mice, see how they run!

She had been afraid of Rosemary's death. The thought of its approach had haunted her for weeks, night and day, as a thing ominous and terror-striking, an experience more awful than pain. And now it had come and gone as lightly as the wind

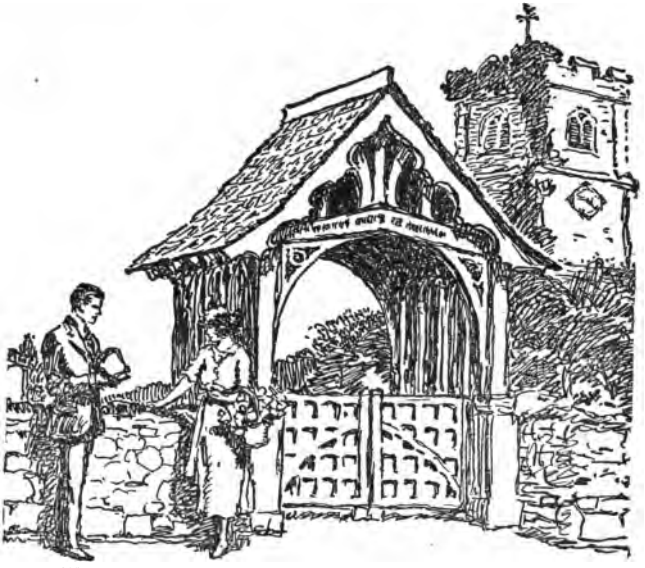
moving aside a little shape of mist; and there was nothing left but love.

Rosemary's death made very little difference to the life of Rock Lodge. Mrs. Featherstone hardly seemed to notice it, but people who knew her best said it was curious, but that from the day the child died they never saw her laugh again. Mr. Featherstone prefaced nearly all his remarks with, "Since the terrible loss of my little daughter——" The rest of the family were quite normal about it.

Even Joy was normal. She felt so much happier and freer, and as if her heart had suddenly expanded to meet everybody else's. She wanted to see Nicolas again, but it was a long time before she saw him properly. He had been at Rosemary's funeral. Joy had suddenly realized that he was standing close to her at the grave-side, and she had been very glad of his presence.

She had not minded the funeral; it did not seem to have anything to do with Rosemary. It was a blowy autumnal day, with spaces of light-blue sky between white, polished clouds. The dead leaves ran across the graves, and far below them the sea plunged playfully in and out of the rocks. The clergyman's white surplice blew up all round him

like a toy balloon, and Joy thought she must be sure to tell Rosemary how funny it looked; and then something very sharp went through her like the prick of a needle, and she remembered that



"He ran across Joy unexpectedly at the churchyard gate"

she would never tell Rosemary anything funny any more.

Julia wrote to her afterward, and said that Nicolas had been given leave to attend the staff college for a year's course, so that he would n't be going back to India for a long time. She wrote as if she were a little hurt with Joy about some-

thing, but she did n't explain what it was. A very few weeks later Julia married Owen, and went to live far away in Surrey.

It was nearly a year before Nicolas came back from the staff college. He ran across Joy unexpectedly at the churchyard gate.

"Hello," he said. "I was just coming up to see you."

Joy had a basket of roses on her arm. She was going to put them on Rosemary's grave. She would n't have gone on doing it with any one else, but it seemed quite natural to go into the churchyard with Nicolas. After she had put the roses all round the green little mound and Nicolas had fetched the water for her, she went and sat with him on a bench by the church.

Joy scolded Nicolas a little for not having written to her or been for such a long time to see them.

"Has it seemed long?" said Nicolas.

"Years and years," said Joy, sadly.

Nicolas thought she meant that the time had seemed long because she had been unhappy about Rosemary, but he was n't quite sure. He began to play with a ribbon on Joy's dress.

"It seemed long to me, too," he said in a shy voice, "but I didn't want to bother you."

"As if you *could* have bothered me!" said Joy, reproachfully. "Why, Nicolas, I don't think there's anybody I know as well as I know you."

"Still, I suppose you may know a person too well," said Nicolas, tentatively—"too well to be interested in them, I mean."

"O Nicolas!" exclaimed Joy, indignantly, "how horrid of you to think such a thing! The more you know a person, the more you love them."

Nicolas didn't say anything at all to that; he seemed quite extraordinarily interested in Joy's ribbons.

"You didn't seem to want me last time I was here," he went on after a pause. "I expect it was because you were upset, but I felt badly—as if you didn't want me to share it with you. You were rather sick with me for some reason or other, weren't you?"

Joy thought for a moment. She remembered dimly that she had had a queer, unkind feeling about Nicolas, but it hadn't lasted, and she couldn't remember now why she had had it.

"I expect," she said thoughtfully, "it was because I was so upset and I couldn't share it. It

was like waiting for something that was going to happen. I could n't stop it happening, however hard I tried, but it seemed as if I had to keep waiting for it, and I did n't want to have to attend to anything else while I waited."

"Well, I did n't get much attention," said Nicolas, with a rueful laugh. "D' you think you could give me a little more now, Joy?" He had stopped playing with her ribbon, and took hold of one of her hands, tentatively at first, and then, as she made no effort to withdraw it, with firmness.

It was a curious feeling being held like that by Nicolas, very protecting and kind. Joy liked it; she made no effort at all to take her hand away.

"Of course I'll attend to you," she said quickly; "I want to hear everything about you."

Nicolas gave a contented little sigh, but he did n't seem to have anything more to say. He just sat there, with his shoulder touching hers, looking down at her hand.

"Begin at the beginning and end at the end," Joy said, "as in fairy-tales."

"You 're the beginning," said Nicolas, quietly, "and you 're the end—and all the rest of it. Nothing has happened to me except you."

Joy remembered what her mother had told her

long ago about men. Perhaps she ought to take her hand away from Nicolas, but she did not want to. She felt a great tenderness for Nicolas. It was not exactly love, but a very little would have turned it into love.

"You see," Nicolas explained, "you were too

"'You're the beginning,' said Nicolas, quietly, 'and you're the end'"

young before I went to India, and when I came back, I suppose you were too unhappy; but I have felt just the same always. Do you remember what I asked you to promise me in the Doone Valley?"

Joy nodded.

"You might have known," she said, "that I should n't, anyhow. But I remember promising."

"Of course your mother was perfectly right," Nicolas said— "to stop my kissing you, I mean; but she would n't be right to stop it now, if you liked me enough to let me, Joy."

"Enough," said Joy, thoughtfully, "to let you kiss me. Why, of course I do, Nicolas."

But Nicolas did not take any advantage of this lightly given favor; he only put his hand on Joy's shoulder and drew her round so that she was looking straight at him.

"Enough to marry me," asked Nicolas, firmly. "I could marry you now. I have enough for us to live on, and of course, as I 'm the eldest son, I shall eventually have Pallant. We could take a furnished house at Aldershot until I have finished my course, if you don't mind furnished houses.

"I know it 's rather a sacrifice to ask of any woman—that Indian business, I mean. Sooner or later you have to choose between leaving your husband or your kids; but I know how you love children. I hope I should n't be selfish about you, Joy."

And then he saw that Joy was horrified. She was shaking all over under his hand. Cold perspiration broke out on her forehead. It had all

swept over her again, that premature agony of the tortured child. Her mind felt frantic, as if the child's screams still lingered in it, as if death had done nothing to relieve her.

No, she could n't face that again. She could n't risk having a child, not even for Nicolas—another child that might be put under the harrow like that and cry out to her to release it.

And when she met Nicolas's eyes, the horror went straight through him. He thought it was horror of himself. He sprang to his feet.

"Joy," he cried thickly, "d' you feel like that?"

Joy could not speak; she only nodded, with shaking lips. She wished he had n't got up and gone away from her. She had a hunger for his protection and the solid, kindly comfort of his touch upon her shoulder; and yet she had no right to take that comfort.

Nicolas looked horrified, too, and he looked angry, as if the horror was unfair to him, after his great content.

"I beg your pardon," he said fiercely; "I 've made the most abject mistake. I thought you said I did n't bother you, but I see I do. Never mind; I 'll never, as long as I live, touch you again. Don't be afraid. I see exactly what you feel.

You don't like saying 'No' to me, because I 'm such an old friend, but you 'd hate me to be anything more to you. I was right, after all, to keep away from you after last time, and a fool to come back."

"I could n't face it," whispered Joy,—her cheeks had become a curious gray-white, and she was still trembling,—"not yet, Nicolas."

"You 'll never have to face it," said Nicolas, bitterly, "either now or at any other time. Good-by."

He hurried away from the little churchyard and out of her sight down the long hill. Joy shut her eyes for a few moments after he had gone. The sunlight on the late September flowers frightened and hurt her. This had never happened to her before. She had been so quiet and happy all the year. She had n't had to think of children, little children that might look up at her with hurrying, questioning eyes—eyes which she could not satisfy; children who might cry out at her, "O Joy, I don't like pain; take it away!" And she could n't take it away.

If only Nicolas had known that it was n't of him at all that she was thinking, if he could have heard that dreadful little tune pursuing her, he

would have understood the horror, and he would have taken her in his arms and taught her how horror can be healed. But Nicolas had understood nothing but that his love was dreadful to the only person in the world whom he could ever love.

VII

PEOPLE at places like Lynton do not have nervous breakdowns, but sometimes they feel the need of going away for a little change. A little change, it was decided, was what Joy wanted after she had refused Nicolas, and it was very convenient that Julia Ransome, far away in a place called Surrey, should have had twins and want Joy to come and help her look after them.

The twins were expansive, voracious creatures requiring a great deal of concentration. Nothing went wrong with them, but they had a great many wants, and all of them were compulsory. Joy became absorbed in the twins. Weeks slipped into months, and she still bore with Surrey.

Julia and Owen had a fine and flowered place, very dry and light. Their large, new, pompous house had every convenience and no significance. There were excellent meals and beds in it, and expensively dressed neighbors streamed hilariously through the house and out into the neat, flat garden to play games. There was seldom an hour

out of the day in which there was not a meal or a game going on.

Julia and Owen entertained a great deal without taking much trouble about it. There was always enough of everything, and when they said they must have more, they only meant that they had to order it. There were no contrivances and no sacrifices in their household life; after Joy came, even the question of the twins, which had weighed slightly on Julia's mind, despite the presence of an excellent old nurse, immediately lifted. She was free now to be more constantly where Owen wanted.

It sometimes flashed through Joy's mind that marriage had changed Julia. The Pennants had never spent money as if it were water, or time as if it were as irresponsible as air. They had duties and difficulties, and on the whole they profited by both these limitations. With all that was going on around her, Joy was aware of a curious lack of profit.

Joy wondered if Julia felt it, too, and missed the vast expanses of the moors, where one could walk all day long and meet nothing but one's own thoughts, and where life itself took all the time there was. In the old days she could easily have

asked Julia which life she preferred, but now she could n't ask her. Marriage had flowed around Julia like a tidal sea, and cut her off from the mainland of girlhood. She was radiantly happy, but she was not within reach, and her eyes wore a gay and guarded expression, as if what she enjoyed had in it a hint of danger.

Sudden imatiences and irritations broke through her happiness. It was not when her own will was crossed that Joy noticed these uncharacteristic flurries. Julia had submerged her personal will; but if by any chance Owen could not have what he wanted, Julia, whose temper had always been placid and impregnable, flamed up into sudden vehemence. She wanted so much to make Owen happy that it seemed as if something was at stake if she did not succeed. Beneath the easy flow of her life there were secret snags which broke into a curious violence.

But if marriage had changed Julia, it had done nothing at all to Owen Ransome; he was gayer than Joy remembered him, but he had probably not been gayer then only because she was sad. Even now he could easily suppress it, and about his gaiety there was never any hardness or ruthlessness, as there sometimes was about Julia's.

He was a charming host, eager about the amusements of his guests and never seeking to emphasize his own. Owen loved his twins. Joy found him oftener in the nursery than Julia. He confided to her that he felt it terribly absurd to make such a sweep into fatherhood, but he always knew how much they weighed and which was cutting his first tooth.

Owen's manner to Joy was perfect. It was as if he had found in her something specially delightful which would please his wife; it was almost as if he felt the need of propitiating Julia. Yet what need had he to propitiate his happy wife? She had everything in the world she wanted, a husband she adored, health like fine steel, children that would have won any baby prize if they had not been born in a sphere above the need of prizes. Julia could have all the clothes, conveyances, and friends she liked. There was no one to say "No" to her least reasonable wishes.

Joy could not imagine Owen ever saying "No." If he had a fault, it was a too ready acquiescence in the wants of others, so ready that he sometimes gave his agreement without seeing that their wants conflicted. His good nature had no apparent

end. It was perhaps merely the profundity of his love for Julia which gave him the appearance of trying to lay his hand upon a compensation for her, as if there was something which, after all, he knew she had not got.

"Oh, I know I am the luckiest person in the world," Julia would say to Joy, with an undercurrent of irony in her voice; "you need n't tell me that. I have n't even the smallest of Job's boils, let alone his misfortunes. I suppose, if I saw a misfortune, I should not know what it was."

"Oh, but it 's more than the things you have n't got," Joy said in the only memorable conversation their interrupted life ever left them peace to go into. "It 's being, I suppose, so loved. I can see it in you, Julia, as if some one had set a lamp behind a curtain. You pull the curtain down, of course, I know, but the light shines through."

Julia gave her a long, curious look, then she said:

"And you, my dear—don't tell me you have n't as much right to such an illumination as I have. How about the love that poor old Nick has for you? You 're the gentlest human being I know, and yet it 's odd, to say the least of it, how you

hurt without a qualm the person who loves you most."

"I did n't hurt him without a qualm," Joy answered in a low voice, "but it 's so much to be sure of, Julia. I want to know I can bear it. I think now I can nearly bear it. Your babies are so well; neither of them ever has anything the matter with it."

Julia stared a little.

"My babies?" she asked. "What do you mean, Joy? What have my babies to do with your not marrying old Nick?"

"Don't you know why I refused him?" Joy asked. "I told him I was afraid if I had children they might be ill. I have n't talked to you very much about that time with Rosemary. I did n't think I could; you 're so happy, and one can't tell happy people everything. But I 've been very frightened about children being ill. No one could mind death for people after they 'd seen pain; but pain is dreadful, and you can't stop it. That 's what I 'm afraid of. But I 'm getting better all the time; being afraid is n't any good. I think in the end it makes more pain, so I do try not to be afraid."

Julia looked at Joy for a long time, and then she said in her tender voice:

"Are you quite sure Nicolas understood that that was why you were refusing him?"

"I think he must have understood," Joy replied. "I tried to tell him, but he went away very quickly.

"'Being married must make it easier to tell people things'"

Being married must make it easier to tell people things, because they 're always there."

"No, it does n't," said Julia, quickly; "it makes it harder. You see, you 've said all you 've got to say. They know, or think they know; you can't make a fresh impression on people who already know."

"But some people understand so quickly!" Joy persisted. "I should think Owen did without being told."

Instantly that guarded look came over Julia's eyes. She ceased to be Julia; she became a wife.

"He is wonderfully sympathetic, is n't he?" she said in a cheerful, perfunctory voice that put an end to the subject. It was as if Julia still wanted to say something more, but not about Owen.

She waited for a long time, hoping that Joy would give her an opportunity; but Joy did n't want to talk to this new Julia, who had an incommunicable consciousness. She wanted the old one, who talked on the same footing as herself. Finally, Julia produced in despair a fresh subject which might have a more fortunate turn.

"It 's curious," she said, "how much Nicolas dislikes Owen. Did you know they had been at school together? I simply can't have him in the house. Owen's perfectly willing,—he 's most dear and kind about it,—but Nicolas won't come."

"Not even to see the twins?" Joy asked in horror. Julia shook her head. "But surely he must say why," Joy insisted. "It is n't like Nicolas to be so utterly unfair and unkind."

Julia rose slowly and straightened a picture on the wall; she answered Joy without turning to face her.

"He did n't want us to get married, you know," she said. "He 's terribly obstinate. But, Joy dear, he would not make a bad husband—poor old Nick!"

The next morning Joy got a letter from her mother to ask her to go home.

"We have had rather an excitement," Mrs. Featherstone wrote. "Nicolas has been at home for a week or two lately, and he and Maude seem to consider themselves engaged."

Joy was sitting in the rose garden when she read this letter. It had always seemed to her rather a silly little garden, like something arranged for a bazaar.

There were rows and rows of very expensive teas. They smelt extraordinarily strong and sweet and had the most exquisite coloring; but they grew there in that flat, expensive way only because they had been planted without love or forethought by gardeners.

Her eyes lifted themselves to the finished blooms, and something in her heart fluttered desperately as if it felt itself suddenly drawn in and caged. Something that had been wild and free and quite nameless knew that it would never feel free again. Joy had never wanted anything for

herself before, and even now she felt she had no real claim on Nicolas; only he had always stood there, the one solid figure in her life. He had n't been like a light inside her; he had never come near enough to her for that, but as long as Nicolas lived, she had felt sure that he was there for her.

It would n't make any difference now, she told herself. Maude's husband would be her brother, and all her brothers were dear to her, and would be just as dear whether they married or not. Yet she could not help that sharp rebellion of instinct which behind her reason told her that it would never be the same, that already it was different.

The curious feeling in her heart grew all the time. There was nothing to look forward to any more. She need n't be afraid of having a sick child, and, with the final retreat of that fear, hope darkened in her. There would only be other people's children now, and other people's loves.

Maude's, for instance. Of course Maude would want her back at once. They must get everything ready together, and Maude would want to tell her about Nicolas. Already Maude knew a great deal more about Nicolas than Joy would ever know. Joy had never known Nicolas as a

lover, and lovers are always different. They conceal more, perhaps, but they give more. They give all they have; they conceal only what they have not.

A hot wave of color swept over Joy's face as she envisaged Nicolas as a lover. Then, resolutely and without hesitation, she put the Nicolas of her dreams out of her heart forever; the Nicolas of fact remained. He was going to be her brother-in-law.

She made this final transference very swiftly, and as she looked up, she saw Owen Ransome watching her through the roses. He came and sat down beside her without speaking. He had a quality of easy intimacy which was very reassuring in moments of emotion.

Joy said at once, and with no visible effort:

"I have very good news this morning. Nicolas is going to marry my sister Maude. I must go home at once."

"That won't be very good news for Julia," Owen answered lightly—"your going home, I mean. And the other—you are really pleased about it? I remember your sister Maude. She was a little like you, about as like you as a garden

flower is to a wild one. You don't mind my calling you a wild one, I hope."

Joy shook her head.

"I know I am untidy," she said regretfully; "I always was; it takes so long not to be, and there are always so many other things I want to do instead. Maude manages her time better, of course, and I think the marriage will be a very good thing, because, you see, I love them both so much, they could n't have nicer people for each other."

Owen hesitated for a moment; then he said a little drily:

"Nicolas is n't very imaginative."

"No," agreed Joy, truthfully, "I don't think he is; but I don't think people *have* to be, do you, if they 're kind and straight and like Nicolas, I mean?"

Owen gave an odd little laugh.

"I don't think they *have* to be at all," he said; "but I think, if they are n't, they are liable to make rather serious mistakes."

"But Maude is n't imaginative, either," Joy explained a little anxiously; "so, you see, he won't be likely to make any bad mistakes about her, will he?"

"Oh, no," agreed Owen; "I should think Maude would be perfectly safe."

Then he stood up in front of Joy as if he wanted a man who was staying in the house, and appeared to be going to approach them, not to see that she was there.

"I think you look as if you felt the heat this morning," he said in a persuasive tone. "Do you know what I 'd do if I were you? I should cut along up to the nursery,—it 's the coolest room in the house,—and I 'll send breakfast up to you. It 's such a bore having to talk to a lot of people round a table in the morning, particularly when one is n't feeling very fit. Don't come down again till lunch. I 'll tell Julia your—your good news."

"Oh, will you?" asked Joy, with a little gasp of relief.

It was quite true she did feel the heat, for when she stood up, her knees shook under her, and it suddenly seemed as if it would have been extraordinarily difficult to tell Julia that Nicolas was going to marry Maude.

Joy gave Owen a quick, grateful little glance, and he met her eyes with an expression that was

like sympathy, only, of course, he had nothing to be sympathetic about. He merely had, as Joy had noticed before, particularly nice, kind eyes.

VIII

IT came slowly and wonderfully to Joy that she was in her own country again. The earth itself turned from its drab browns and grays to a deep, rich red. The fields and hedges lost their look of overcareful handling, and melted into moors. The trees, heavier and more human, brooded tenderly over the wet, green pastures. The country became moister and milder. Ferns grew in every cranny; the thatched houses had a blurred and weather-beaten homeliness. The people she saw from the train windows were more placid; they moved slowly, with the air of natural things, unsurprised.

Joy had a sense of enormous thankfulness in finding herself at home. Nicolas might fail her, but not the incorruptible shapes and colors of her native Devon. Nobody here would fly about all day long and arrive nowhere.

Maude met her with Fidget at a junction ten miles from Lynton. She seemed part of the freshness and sweetness that was in Joy's heart.

She had loved Maude always and accepted her always; there could be nothing inimical or painful in the round, soft, pink face uplifted for her kiss.

Maude hurried her along to the dog-cart to relieve Fidget's well-known dislike of standing.

"I didn't bring a groom," Maude explained; "I wanted to talk. We can drive in turns if you like. Dick, have you everything in at the back? All right, Hoskins; let her go, please. There, we 're off! It is nice to see you, Joy; nicer than to see anybody, except Nick, of course."

"I 'm awfully glad, dear, about Nick," Joy said gently. She had been afraid it would be a little difficult to speak of Nick for the first time; but it had not been difficult, and if it had been, Maude would not have noticed.

"There," said Maude, with satisfaction, "I knew you would be glad. I told mother so. Mother and father have both been rather awful. I can't tell you what a mercy it is you 're back. They behave as if I 'd done something shabby. If they expect people to get engaged sitting round a tea-table under the noses of their parents, they 're very much mistaken. But of course they 're both hopelessly old-fashioned. I wanted to tell you all about it first, so that you could see

my point of view. What are you staring at so hard?"

"Nothing," said Joy. "Only the hills are just the same. They have the old purple look, as if there was a spirit of darkness moving over them."

"Of course they 're just the same. You 'd hardly expect the hills to change just because you 've been to Surrey, would you?" asked Maude, with some impatience. "As for purple, you might call them purple if the heather was out, though heather is really red; but as the heather 's not out, they can't even be *called* purple. There must be something wrong with your eyes."

This question rapidly settled, Maude returned with relief to her more personal topic.

"My feeling was, you see," she explained, "that I 'd much better make hay while the sun shone. It 's no use pretending I 'm as pretty as you are, Joy, and though I love having you at home, I get a good deal more attention while you 're away. There 's Nick, for instance. He never looked at me while you were there; but when you were n't, I took care that he should. That 's what all the row 's about. I don't see why poor Nick should n't have a wife and children like everybody else just because *you* won't have him. He was very down

in the mouth at first. He used to spend all the time fishing, and never opened his lips. I hurried off after breakfast and fished with him. They made a fuss because I did n't let them know where I was going, and if I had, they 'd have made another fuss because it was n't proper. Being proper

"'Being proper isn't the way to get married now'"

is n't the way to get married now, and so I told them; but they only got rattier. They thought I was 'visiting the poor.'"

Joy considered these statements carefully. She could picture very well what happened as far as Nick was concerned. He must have sat taciturn and disgusted on a bank, too polite to get up and go away; but where her imagination broke down was what in particular Maude had done to shake him out of his gloom and turn him into a lover. She knew Nicolas and she knew Maude. What

she did n't know was what made the farmers' sons stare at Maude when they did n't stare at her, and it was precisely this quality which had drawn Nick out of his gloom.

"We all thought you were never coming back," Maude went on, "you seemed so wrapped up in Julia and her old twins. I told Nick you 'd never marry. You 're just one of the women who don't."

"Am I?" asked Joy. "But—" and then she pulled herself up. What had been on her tongue's tip was that nobody but Nick had ever asked her, and that she had n't meant to go on refusing Nick.

"I 've been quite unhappy," pursued Maude in a loud, cheerful voice which bore no community with grief. "You see, I don't mind telling you it was n't particularly easy getting engaged to Nick; he always had that nursery idea about you. But he does want to marry and he always liked me well enough; and now it all depends on you really whether it comes off or not."

"On me?" asked Joy, in astonishment. "But, my dear, it does n't depend on any one *now* except upon you and Nick."

"Oh, that 's all nonsense, of course," said Maude, with the unruffled cynicism of common

sense. "Being engaged is no help, really. Men and women in love don't depend on anything except whether they have the chance or not. The question is, Are you prepared to keep out of my way?"

Joy drew in a wondering breath. Was that, after all, one of the ways in which to look at love?

"I 'll keep out of your way, of course," she agreed. "Only, Maude, do you think you 'll be happy with a man who only wants you when—when other people are n't in the way?"

"Oh, it 's different when you 're married," Maude explained. "You never understand about things like that, but I do. I shall know where I am when I marry Nick. Besides, you can't seriously imagine Nick breaking a vow, can you? When we 're married, we 're married; he 'll see that for himself."

"But he ought to be able to see it now," Joy persisted. "You know I 'd never dream of coming between you, but if there 's the slightest danger of his turning to me, why did you ask me to come back?"

"Well, there is n't any danger unless you let there be," Maude said frankly. "I wanted you all right. You and I have always done things

together, and no one sews as well as you do. Patch is no use unless she has you to stand over her, and, for another thing, I wanted you to make the parents less sniffy. If you 're on my side, everything will be easier all round. I 'll take on Nick if you take on everything else."

The purple shadows had grown darker; the dense bloom upon the hills made them seem as if they were inclosing Fidget, the dog-cart, the long, winding ribbon of road, in a fuller tenderness. Joy could feel on her lips the keen and tonic taste of the sea.

"Very well," she said after a long pause, "I 'll take on whatever you like; only you must n't ask me to do anything at all about Nick. What has to be done about him must always be done through you. I want him to feel I 'm just the same as any other sister, not a person who has to manage or explain or even keep out of the way."

"There 's only one thing you must do about him yourself," Maude agreed when she had thought this over. "When you first see him be sure and tell him you 're glad. If he believes *that*, everything will be easier."

Joy forgot about Nick for the rest of the evening. It was almost bewildering to see with her

eyes all that she had been seeing only in her heart. Everything had to be visited. She wanted to see every one she knew and then all the things which belonged to those she loved. Certain of them had escaped her memory, and came upon her suddenly with a happy thrill of recognition.

She had forgotten the solid set of her mother's work-basket planted upon the drawing-room table. Her father had often expostulated upon its presence in a room so sacred to gentility, but Mrs. Featherstone merely replied that she sat where she worked, and worked where she sat, and this strange and inexplicable repository had remained a public landmark.

The dogs bustled to and fro in an ecstasy of proprietary welcome. They were just as anxious as Joy was that nothing should escape her notice. Mr. Featherstone was gratified by Joy's return. She was his favorite child, and he took it as a personal compliment that she should be so pleased to come back.

"Your old father has seen to things while you were away," he said, as if his ministrations had kept the cliffs in their places and carried on the career of waterfalls. It had, as a matter of fact, been her mother who saw to the animals and had

taken over, in addition to her own, all her daughter's duties. Mrs. Featherstone said nothing at all on Joy's arrival; she only held her close for a moment and looked at her with eyes in which a very deep love showed for a moment like a warning and then vanished.

Patch cried when Joy rushed up to the nursery to embrace her, but, then, Patch cried very easily. There was no need to seek a reason for her tears.

Maude had Rosemary's room now, and Joy slept alone, but she did not sleep much that first night. The harvest moon, the color of an orange, leaned over the edge of the valley and took all the shadows out of the rock garden. The garden was full of its mysterious, thin light. The flowers around the lawn bathed in it, but though their petals were very plain, it could not give them any color. The sea moved far away and softly, as if it were complaining in its sleep. Sharper, and with a melancholy wail, an owl hooted. The night was still, but there was a restlessness in it, as of unknown forces which stir before they act.

After breakfast next day Nicolas came. Joy saw him first, but she remembered that it was not she who must run down the drive and open the

gates for Moonlighter any more. She hurried up to the nursery, where Patch was sitting, and they sewed together all the morning.

Joy went down for lunch and saw Nicolas alone for a moment in the garden, close by the hall-door. She said, "Nick, I 'm so glad!" but she felt a little breathless as she said it. She held out both her hands to him, but Nick took only one of them, and even that he dropped almost as soon as he had touched it. He looked at her with a curious sternness without attempting to smile.

"Are you glad?" he asked. "Very well, then; so am I." And he turned away from Joy and went straight into the house.

It was perfectly easy for her to avoid Nicolas in the weeks that followed. Indeed, she had no opportunity to do anything else. Nicolas avoided her. He never looked at her or spoke to her if he could possibly help it. It made Joy feel very sad. She had believed it possible that a new love could not altogether sink an old relationship, and she had not thought it would be so difficult to have less and still keep that less alive. But this new Nicolas had no need for her at all. She seemed not to exist for him even as a shadow.

Nicolas was a most kind and attentive lover.

There was perhaps neither the enthusiasm nor the pride of possession natural to a young man, but Nicolas was always reserved. It was not strange that he should hide his feelings, and his actions were perfectly satisfactory. He always stood by Maude's side as if he was prepared to do what she liked and enjoyed being in her presence.

They were both thorough sportsmen and they spent all their time riding, shooting, and fishing. When it was dry enough and they wanted to be at home, they played tennis valiantly on the lawn, and chaffed each other in the family circle round the tea-table.

The marriage was to be in six weeks, and Joy found her whole time and energy absorbed in helping her mother with the arrangements and finishing Maude's trousseau.

It was to be a big county wedding, and they were to have a large reception afterward. Nicolas was going to retire from the army. His father had died a few months previously, and he had become the owner of a large, rather scattered estate. Nicolas was going to be his own bailiff and keep the stag hounds for the Exmoor Hunt.

It was just the kind of life Nicolas liked, but

no one would have guessed this fact from the expression his eyes had in repose. Maude was as near the height of human happiness as any mortal ever reaches. She came in and out of rooms as if she was conferring a favor by her presence, her pink face grew almost solemn with importance, and there is very little doubt she would have patronized Mrs. Featherstone if she had dared. She treated Joy as if she were a younger and wholly insignificant being, to whom Providence intended her to be benevolently disposed.

Mr. Featherstone had recovered from the nefarious way in which he considered the engagement had taken place; he would never quite forgive Nicolas for not having married Joy, but he felt an increased appreciation for Maude because she was marrying Nicolas.

Nicolas was the most suitable match in the neighborhood, and he made, unasked, extremely handsome settlements.

"In the case of my death," Mr. Featherstone remarked with the sympathetic gloom no other subject inspired in him, "at least *one* of my children will be provided for."

It was a week before the marriage. Patch had gone down for her tea, but Joy still sat in the

nursery, where she had been putting finishing touches to Maude's wedding dress. She was tired of sewing, but she did not want to go down to tea; she had heard people drive up and a clamor of half-strange voices in the hall. Patch would bring her up something by and by, and when she was rested she would finish off Maude's new caps.

She went to the nursery cupboard and pulled out their old Noah's ark. Mrs. Featherstone had told her, if she thought it was in good enough repair, she might give it to the twins. There were no such Noah's arks to be found in modern toy-shops; each animal was covered with actual hair, and all were small, but beautiful, copies of the originals.

Nicolas had had a peculiar gift for mending animals, and whenever he came over to play, necks, legs, and arms recovered their natural attitudes. Joy stood the animals out one by one upon the window-sill. There was a lifelike monkey, a peacock with real feathers on its tail, and a very large, fat dove. Apparently the raven was missing, but a guinea-pig came out the size of a wolf. Then the giraffe appeared, whose neck Nicolas had mercifully restored to him, and it was just as she stood him up to see if he was per-

fectly himself that Nicolas opened the door and came in. He said:

"Oh, they told me Maude was here," and then stopped as if there was nothing more to say, looking at the animals.

He was standing by the nursery door holding the handle in his hand as if he was afraid of letting go.

"No, she is n't here," said Joy, carefully; "but, Nicolas, I 'm glad it 's only me. I wanted to say something to you."

He came forward and stood near her, looking at the giraffe as if he was fascinated by it. His eyes for the first time since she had come back did not look hard.

"These are our old animals, you know," said Joy after a pause. "Do you remember the peacock's tail? You helped me dye the feathers blue when the old ones came off, and Rosemary cried."

"I remember," said Nicolas in a curious, dry voice.

"I can't find the zebra," Joy went on a little breathlessly. "Can you think what happened to it?"

"I think we buried it in the garden under the pink may-tree," said Nicolas, "as a sin offering,

because we liked it the best and had stolen old Honeyman's apples. I don't remember unburying it."

Nicolas knelt down by the window-seat and pulled out of the ark a chicken the same size as a spotted leopard with which it had got inextricably mixed.

"This fellow's leg is n't right," he said unsteadily. "Have you any glue?"

Joy found some on a shelf, and Nicolas very carefully set to work upon the leopard's leg.

"What was it you wanted to say to me?" he asked without raising his head.

"Oh, nothing really," Joy explained; "nothing now. I was rather upset before, because you were n't friendly to me, Nicolas, and I—you see, I thought I was coming home——"

Nicolas bent lower over the leopard's leg.

"What d' you mean?" he asked. "You' are home, are n't you?"

"Not if you 're not friendly," said Joy, quickly. She knew now what she had wanted to say to him. "You see, Nick dear, when the boys marry, I sha'n't lose them. Why, I could n't bear it, could I, not to go on being their sister? And I don't see why I should n't keep you in the same

way. You have always been one of the boys, Nick."

Nicolas put down the leopard, abruptly.

"I 've heard from Julia," he said, and without a word of warning he buried his hard head in Joy's lap and burst into sobs.

Joy knew that Nick never cried, not even when he was only eight years old and broke his wrist jumping. His breath came in great gasps, as if he were running a race and had been beaten. Joy put both her hands over his head and bent over him.

"O Nick!" she whispered, "Nick! my Nick!"

Nicolas, after a minute or two, got up and stood with his back to her, looking out of the window.

"I 've been a fool, my dear," he said at last, "and I 've got to go on being a fool. That 's all there is to it. You 'd have done what I asked you if I 'd waited. That 's what Julia told me. I suppose it 's true?"

"O Nick," she said, "she ought n't to have told you—not now. It is n't any use, is it? I 'd do anything in the world you wanted always—except hurt Maude."

"Yes," he said without turning toward her; "but that 's the point, is n't it? The only thing

I want *would* hurt Maude. But we may as well have the whole thing out now, anyhow. I thought when I asked you that time it was me you minded, —my being your lover, I mean,—but Julia says it was n't. She says you were afraid because of Rosemary, and having a ~~kid~~ child that might be ill, and that you 'd have got over it, and that, anyway, you liked me for myself. Don't mind telling me the truth now. I 'll do just what you wish. I 'll always do what you wish, but I want to know."

"O Nick," said Joy, "I thought you knew what I meant then. It is n't any use my saying it. Oh, but of course I liked you."

"Enough to marry me?" Nick persisted.

"Enough for anything in the world," said Joy, firmly.

Nicolas said nothing for a long time; then he said in a low voice:

"I suppose you would n't let me kiss you once?"

Joy hung her head miserably. She wanted to kiss him, her arms ached to hold him close against her heart and take his pain into her very being; but even if she took it, she could not keep it. He would have to take it away with him in the end, and some instinct told her that if he held her in his arms, he would have to take more pain.

She shook her head without speaking, and held out her hand to him. Nick took it, and very gently kissed each of her fingers. Then he said:

"I 'd like it for a bit if we did n't see each other." And Joy said:

"Shall I go now, Nick, or wait till after the wedding?"

And Nick said:

"Oh, the wedding does n't matter. Better stay till that 's over, of course."

Then he remembered about the leopard's leg, and finished it properly before he went downstairs.

IX

THE wedding went off very well. Arrangements in the Pennant and Featherstone circles usually went off well. They were considered sacred and put before everything else. No one altered a plan lightly, and no one dreamed of letting a feeling interfere with an arrangement. People could feel as they liked, provided that they behaved as they were expectd to behave.

Maude made an excellent bride; it was almost a pity that so much brisk competence should be confined to one occasion, but there was nothing in the robust appearance of Nicolas which promised to provide her with a further opportunity.

Nicolas stood up to his wedding as he would have stood up to be shot. No one could have told whether he was willing to be either married or shot, but they could be perfectly sure that he would go through the ordeal as if he were willing, if he considered it necessary to go through it at all. There was something about Nicolas's will as compulsory as a prison wall within which he condemned himself to solitary confinement.

"The wedding went off very well"

Joy worked up to the last moment of the wedding, and mercifully through everything except the actual service. She had to remember lists of things which still needed the holding together of a careful eye. She dressed the bride and stood behind her at the altar. There were four bridesmaids, but Joy was the maid of honor. She could see Nicolas's unchanging face and steady eye whenever she looked up. He stood like a figure carved out of stone, and even when she could not see him, she knew how he looked.

They went through the whole long, old-fashioned service, and several hymns sung with penetrating ardor by their two village choirs. Everything was perfectly in order. The bride and bridegroom were told quite clearly what was expected of them, and about the whole transaction there was that particular blend of violent idealism and hard common sense which is so often found when the laws of God and man are expected to conform to one another.

Joy was a devout churchwoman, but it just flashed through her mind as she listened to the stately homily pronounced by the vicar that something or other, she did n't quite know what, escaped.

A few weeks after the wedding, while Nicolas and Maude were still enjoying their honeymoon (they had decided to spend it upon the golf course at St. Andrews'), Joy received a startling letter from Julia.

An accident had happened to her which did n't seem very clear even after Julia had rather elaborately explained it. She had gone up, she wrote, to the roof to have a look at a choked drain-pipe, and, slipping on a dead leaf, had fallen forty feet to the ground. She ought, she supposed, to have been killed; but she was n't in the least dead, and, barring rather a badly broken leg, none the worse for her fall. But would Joy care to come and look after her household for her until she could get about again? She knew it was rather a tall order, but the servants were good and already devoted to Joy, and she could n't trust any one else. Still, Joy must not come if she would rather not, *if for any reason she would rather not.* Julia underlined this statement. She added:

I know all about the wedding. Please don't tell me how beautiful a bride Maude looked. I thought you 'd have the sense to go home and stop it. When I found you had n't, I wrote to Nicolas,—I dare say you won't thank me,—and it appears to have been as useful as most attempts to put crooked

things straight; but I can't bear to see a thing that *can* be helped forced into a stage where it can't.

Don't worry about them, though; they'll probably come out all right in the end, and hardly know it if they don't. They haven't got any illusions to trip them up.

It's you I mind about. Not that I think you *really* cared, but it's dreadful to begin to care and to be left with that particular feeling on your hands.

Try not to be left long. I dare say you think it matters dreadfully whom you marry, but I don't think it does nearly as much as one imagines, provided the man is straight.

Don't be too romantic; take my word for it, it doesn't pay.

The twins are getting on splendidly. They roar like the bulls of Bashan, and spend all their time waxing fat and kicking.

Yours ever,

JULIA.

P.S. It really doesn't pay being too romantic.

This was an odd letter to receive from Julia Pennant, who was the happiest woman in the world. It puzzled Joy so much that she gave it to her mother to read.

Mrs. Featherstone was apparently even more struck by it than Joy had been. She read it through twice, and then asked rather irrelevantly:

"What do you think of Owen Ransome, Joy?"

Joy said at once that he was the most entertaining and sympathetic person she had ever met. He was full of kindness and tact. It was a pity he didn't lead a life that was more worth while; but he was extremely rich, and often went to Lon-

don or even to Paris and Antwerp for meetings on international finance. Still, most of his life was taken up with amusements; however, even the amusements were perhaps part of the upkeep of a business career. Joy did n't know much about business, but whatever she knew about Owen Ran-

"She gave it to her mother to read"

some was to his credit, and she liked to praise him.

Mrs. Featherstone listened to her for some time in silence, then she said:

"People lead the kind of lives they are, unless they are quite abominably weak, when they are led by other people. Good people lead lives that *are* worth while. If they do not, I do not think they can be good."

"But I know Owen is good," said Joy, doubtfully.

"You mean you know he is pleasant," corrected Mrs. Featherstone. "People can afford to be pleasant without any very high moral standard."

"He 's fond of his twins," said Joy, protestingly.

"They're nice, healthy children," observed Mrs. Featherstone, "and he is a rich man to whom fatherhood comes extremely easily. There seems to me no good reason why he should not be fond of his twins."

Joy looked a little uncomfortable. She could not quite give her reasons for thinking Owen good, but she knew she thought him good. Sometimes she was a little less sure about Julia, Julia had so manifestly changed. It really did seem sometimes to Joy that Julia had become a little worldly. She hoped her mother would not ask her any very direct question about Julia; but Mrs. Featherstone seemed to connect the two subjects in some mysterious way, for she said after a pause:

"I knew Julia Pennant very well, and I always liked her very much. I do not like that letter at all. Particularly I dislike her reference to Nico-

las. Nicolas is married now. There is nothing more that can be conveniently said about him. Don't looked so distressed, child. I do not blame you in any way. You have behaved very well, but I hesitate to give my consent to your returning to the house of any one who can write in such a hard and flippant spirit.

"It is an unreserved letter, too, and I never knew Julia Pennant unreserved when she quite obviously should not be. Marriage has deteriorated her, and I was wondering if Owen Ransome is not to blame for it. Perhaps, after all, she is not happy with him."

"Oh, but I know they 're happy," exclaimed Joy, and then for the first time a curious doubt came into her mind. Were they, after all, so happy? She had both their words for it. Owen had said, "Of course ours is the ideal marriage," and Julia had said, "I am the luckiest woman in the world." They were undoubtedly in love. Could people be unhappy and yet in love if they were married?

The Ransomes were secure, good people with regular habits, blessed by twins, and respected by the world around them. These landmarks in a changing universe surely never deceived.

"I don't quite see," Mrs. Featherstone observed thoughtfully, "how Julia came to fall off the roof. She was always so sure-footed."

Joy laughed aloud at this.

"Oh, come, Mummy darling," she said, "you don't really think Owen pushed her off the roof, do you?"

Mrs. Featherstone shook her head. She smiled, too; but she did not say what else she had thought. She only ended by agreeing rather reluctantly that Joy should go to Julia for a few weeks. She would not have given her consent at all if she had not known that Nicolas and Maude were to return in a few days' time. Even though she had just said that nothing further could be said about Nicolas, once he was married, she realized that it was better Joy should not be exposed to seeing the final certainty too vividly presented to her until habit had made the situation easier all round.

Mrs. Featherstone had never mentioned the subject to Joy, but it is probable that she knew all there was to know. She had been annoyed by Julia's letter, but she had not been startled. She put her hand rather shyly on Joy's shoulder as she watched her turn to leave the room.

"My dear," she said, "I don't want to bother

you, but one cannot live to my age and not know a little about life. Perhaps it would be a comfort to you to know that things that happen, however painful they are at the time, do not matter very much for long. Only how we behave to them matters. That matters very much indeed, and it lasts always."

Joy would have liked to say: "O mother, but Nick is n't like that. He minds without stopping." For the only thing Joy felt really unbearable was Nick's tears. But before she had time to say his name, Mrs. Featherstone had pushed her very gently from the room. She did not want to hear his name even uttered. Nicolas was Maude's business now, and silence would teach Joy quickest that Nicolas was Maude's business.

X

IT was late in the afternoon of a dull October day when Joy returned to Pollards. It had been raining for some time, and the air was full of the earthy smell of wet leaves. The dark clouds banked high over the brown, sodden foliage and the chill wind that blew against her face gave her a feeling of something sinister and disheartening. The long terrace, immaculately cleared from leaves, looked stale and empty. Pots of chrysanthemums and asters in their stiff rows had a frightened, apologetic air, as if they were guests invited at the last moment to take the place of chosen friends. Pollards was not a house which could sink softly under a load of creepers; it stood big and bald, staring out flatly across its empty garden beds.

Joy felt, looking around her uncertainly in the gathering dusk, as if the house had no inner life in it. It was strange that Owen, who so understood intimacy, should have bought a "residence" and not a "house"; or was it perhaps Julia who

had so wholly failed to transform it into what it should have been?

Joy suddenly became aware that the terrace was no longer empty. A figure was advancing toward her whom she mistook for a moment for Julia until she remembered that Julia could not walk. It was a much smaller figure than Julia's, but it advanced upon Joy with all the decision of a hostess.

"You 're Miss Featherstone," the young person asserted in a clipped, familiar tone. "Do come in and have some tea before you go up to Mrs. Ransome. I 'm Nina Mullory, Owen Ransome's secretary."

Miss Mullory was different from any one Joy had ever seen before. She had an air of more decision and less grace. She wore a provocative cherry-colored hat drawn rather markedly over one eye; her dress had those accentuated points of fashion which catch and haunt the attention without pleasing it. Her small, tip-tilted face was accentuated, too. Joy thought that Miss Mullory had very red lips for cheeks that managed to be so unnaturally white, and there was something odd about her eyebrows, as if they might have belonged more reasonably to a different face.

But it struck Joy even more that though Miss Mullory was obviously young, she had none of the disabilities of youth. It was in Joy that these disabilities instantly appeared. She felt aware that she had never been so shy before; it was as if she had to be shyer than usual to make up for the aggressive ease of Miss Mullory. Joy wanted to

"Miss Mullory sat down immediately"

go to Julia at once, but she could n't make up her mind to say so. She stood there tentative and helpless while Miss Mullory gave rather sharp orders as to what was to be done with her boxes.

"It 's beastly damp," Miss Mullory observed over her shoulder to Joy, with some impatience. "Do come in."

Joy followed her submissively into the library. It was full of cigarette smoke, and there were

a good many things lying about. It did not look like one of Julia's rooms.

Miss Mullory sat down immediately, with her legs crossed, and lit another cigarette; above it she deliberately studied Joy's appearance without concealment or friendliness. She might have been fingering a remnant in a sale that she considered over-priced. Behind Miss Mullory's bright, expressionless eyes her thoughts were busy.

"Of course she is pretty," Miss Mullory admitted to herself, reluctantly, "but she does n't know what to do with it. Look at her clothes and the way she lets her head hang. It 's astonishing if her color 's real; but it must be, I suppose. She has n't the sense to put it on so well if it is n't. It 's a bore she 's here, but I don't think it 'll really matter."

She signed to the butler to place the tray in front of her and poured out tea. The butler gave a pleading look in Joy's direction, but the crisis had passed before it occurred to Joy that, after all, as Julia's most intimate friend it was she who should have poured out tea.

"How is Mrs. Ransome?" Joy asked softly.

She wanted with a curious urgency to bring Julia back into the room.

"Oh, I suppose she 's getting on all right," Miss Mullory replied, surveying her neat foot, impatiently. "We 'd have heard if she was n't."

Joy looked at her in a puzzled way. Who were "we"? Do secretaries identify themselves so intensely with their employers? But of course Miss Mullory could n't mean Owen, because Owen would always know how Julia was. Perhaps Owen had two secretaries; but Joy almost hoped he had n't. One secretary seemed enough.

"Owen won't be back," Miss Mullory volunteered, "till to-morrow. He 's off up in town. It 's beastly dull down here when he 's away. I don't know what to do with myself. I can't have my own friends down here, and I can't go off anywhere else, or he 'd come back and want me."

"I did not know he was so busy," said Joy, politely. "Of course it must make it very difficult."

Miss Mullory regarded her in a most peculiar way, as if there was a joke in the air which Joy had been a little too slow to catch.

"It might be worse," she said, with a laugh. "Don't you think he 's awfully nice?"

Joy put down her tea-cup. She was very shy, but she was not timid, and she knew that she did not intend to discuss Owen with Miss Mullory.

"His wife is my greatest friend," she said quietly. "I think I have taken for granted that he was nice."

"Well, that 's a funny way of looking at men," said Miss Mullory, defensively. "I don't see what difference his wife can make, anyway. Either a man 's jolly or he is n't."

"I will go up now and see Mrs. Ransome," said Joy. "Thank you so much for giving me my tea."

The other girl leaned back in her chair and stared hard at her. Was this a declaration of war already? Did this very countrified creature, without a sense of the chief values of life, intend to snub a person who had been so extremely successful in "picking up a thing or two"? It almost looked like it, for though Joy's voice was extraordinarily gentle and she had smiled when she spoke, she got up quite decisively and left the room.

Miss Mullory frowned at Joy's departing figure. There were several important items of information which she had intended to extract from her in their first interview, and she had not extracted them. She had an uneasy sense that even

though Joy was a fool, she was not going to be an easy one to handle. She had looked like a child and dressed like a child, but there was in the sudden steadiness of Joy's eyes when she suspected impertinence a quite curious likeness to Julia Ransome's eyes, and Miss Mullory had already met them once too often.

"The twins were having their bath"

Joy ran up unannounced to the nursery. The twins were having their bath. It was an exquisite spectacle. They were sixteen months old now and could frankly participate in, or even more frankly resist, all the processes of life. Baths were the crowning-point of their day. Safe in expert hands, they trampled, crowed, and plunged in broad and spacious seas of warmth and buoy-

ancy. They drifted with the tide, they fought convulsively with sponges; soap threatened and discomfited them momentarily, to sink with a roar into the oblivion of the past.

Pink, wet, and shining, they were at length withdrawn to broad knees and scrubbed with soft towels. They waved their legs in the air and shrieked a few well-chosen, but half-hearted, shrieks to show that they preferred the element of water, even though they admitted that the element of earth was no unsound invention. Sweet-scented powder was sprinkled over their finely manipulated persons. Refreshed and drowsy, they submitted in a kindly spirit to Joy's embraces, and let her carry them triumphantly to bed. Nurse was delighted to see Joy again, and gave her the crowded history of the twins' last two months. It did not strike Joy till afterward that neither Miss Mullory nor Nurse had said anything about Julia's accident.

Julia's room, immaculately tidy, was very light and large. There was fresh air in every corner of it. Julia, propped up on an immense expanse of white pillow, looked peculiarly erect and fine. She had always impressed Joy as a being of inordinate daintiness, like the very finest Dresden

china or the most carefully drawn and delicate old lace. There are beauties who could be planted and shine equally in any class of life, but Julia's beauty was singularly select. She could have been found only in an old and privileged order; the cut of her nostrils, the chiseled lids of her clear, fine eyes, had as unmistakable a look of breeding as the careful points of a race-horse.

She looked as frail as a flower, but she was in reality intensely strong. Nothing could change Julia; certainly falling off a house had n't. Her eyes lit with pleasure as they rested on Joy, and then a curious shadow passed over her face again, as if even over her pleasure in Joy she had to set a guard.

"My dear," she cried out gaily, "ring for tea. You must be dead after that abysmal journey."

"No," said Joy; "I had my tea down-stairs, thanks. A Miss Mullory gave it to me."

"Oh, yes," said Julia, indifferently; "Owen's new secretary. I am glad she had the sense. What did you think of her?"

Joy sat down close to the bed. She looked very steadily at Julia. Her beauty was unchanged, but it seemed to Joy as if a touch of something cold and hard, like frost, had been passed over it. She

felt as she had felt when the wind had met her on the terrace, as if there was the chill of something cruel in the air.

"I don't think," she said consideringly, "I have ever seen a secretary before."

Julia laughed.

"My dear," she said, "you speak as if we had introduced you to a mastodon. There are a great many secretaries, but I am told they differ. You are at liberty to dislike this one, I believe, but not before Owen. Owen's secretaries have several stages. They arrive, they are angels, they develop habits and become human, they find Owen has no habits, raise their wings, and are no more seen. Mercifully, I am spared the stages of this one. I 'm to stay in bed, they tell me, for ages."

"How are you really, Julia?" Joy asked anxiously. "You can't be as well as you look. Tell me the truth; have you been awfully bad?"

"Never," said Julia, lightly. "Nothing in the world is more satisfactory than a broken leg. Everybody believes in it. There it is, you see, a presentable handicap, perfectly easy to explain. 'Poor thing, she 's broken her leg!' I rather like that type of sympathy. If people said, 'Poor thing, what she 's really suffering from is a broken

nose,'—the kind, you know, put out of joint by the attractions of others,—well, then one would resent it, would n't one? But if there is such a thing as pure pity, I am sure it is reserved for broken legs. Mine is healing as rapidly as it can heal. I sha'n't even be lame."

There was no mystery about it, and yet Joy felt a curious reluctance to asking Julia how it happened.

"You 've seen the twins, of course?" Julia asked lightly. "You love me, my dear, but you 'd see me hanged, drawn, and quartered before you 'd let the twins suffer from a crumpled rose-leaf, now, would n't you? It 's curious, your passion for maternity. I remember when you were a tiny girl, you took nine dolls to bed with you and lay on the edge yourself. When the inevitable happened, it was always you that fell out."

"They 're so helpless," Joy pleaded. "You can't do too much for babies."

"Grown-up people can be helpless, too," said Julia, "but not, I grant, so attractively. Besides, no doubt they ought to have managed better. Helplessness in an adult shows a muddled mind."

Joy was n't quite sure what Julia meant. Julia had always been so wonderfully clever and witty

that every one admired her, even in London. It was rumored that a duke had proposed to Julia, and it was always a miracle to Joy why Julia should allow her to be her friend. But perhaps when you 're very clever and witty you still like to be loved, and Joy knew that nobody except Owen could love Julia with so deep and unchanging a love as hers.

"Why must Owen have a secretary in the house?" Joy asked suddenly. "He never did before. I thought secretaries were generally in offices in London."

Julia's eyes grew a little fixed for a moment before she answered, then she said:

"Owen 's been so nice about not leaving me since my accident. He had to go to town yesterday for the first time, but he 'll be back to-morrow. He 's done his work here instead. I miss him absurdly even for a day. It 's a pity I don't go in more for adoring my babies, as you do. It 's an occupation, is n't it? And it gives one another string to one's bow. You ought to hurry up and get a few of your own, you know, Joy."

Joy shook her head.

"Maude thinks," she observed, "that I 'm not a marrying woman."

"That 's rather neat of Maude," said Julia, "after she 's nipped off with your man."

"Oh, but he was n't—you must n't," Joy cried out suddenly. "If he had been, Maude would never have looked at him, and I—I would never have let him go."

Julia looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, then she said: "I 'm rather a brute, I know, but I had to say that. I won't bother you any more about poor old Nick. I 've asked you here, my dear, to take over my household. I shall be laid up for three months. You must take care of Owen for me and keep the little what-you-may-call-'em in her place. She 's quite inconsiderable, really, but I should never forgive myself if—I mean, you must have all your wits about you, Joy. You 're the best child in the world, but tell me frankly, have you any wits?"

Joy considered the question seriously.

"How do you mean, wits?" she asked. "I can run a house—I have for mother when she 's been away—and I can manage servants. Is that what you meant?"

"No," said Julia, still watching her carefully, "not altogether—servants."

"If you mean Miss Mullory," said Joy, "I was

a little afraid of her just at first; but I think I sha'n't be. Poor thing, she has n't any manners, has she? So one has to be rather afraid for her. She might so easily make quite bad mistakes."

"She might," said Julia, with a queer little smile, "and I can't say I should be inconsolable if she did. But men, my dear—have you thought very much about how to manage men? I suppose they are n't all blind in Lynton, are they? Or did Nick scare them away?"

"I don't think I have thought particularly," Joy confessed. "You see, at home men are n't just men; they 're people one 's known awfully well all one's life. The men here won't be so very different, will they? And I shall have Owen to help me. I don't find Owen a bit difficult to talk to; he 's always been so kind to me. I think he must know how much I love you, Julia."

Julia said nothing for a moment, and then she said in a much softer voice:

"I remember how much you used to love me, Joy; but since my marriage do you think I have been altogether the same?"

"I don't know that you have," said Joy, frankly. "You 've had so many other things to think

about, have n't you? But, Julia, I have n't had the other things; I 've always been the same."

Julia had stopped smiling now; she looked very grave. Joy wondered if, after all, she was n't in physical pain. She knew so well the pinched look of acute suffering, and for a moment, only for a moment, she saw it in Julia's face. Then Julia said as serenely as usual:

"No, I don't think *you* have changed. That 's why I sent for you, but I 'm not at all sure it was fair. You may find it a difficult situation."

Joy did n't say anything to this, because Mrs. Featherstone had brought her up to believe that people were meant to face difficult situations. Joy thought that the best way to do was to wait until it came, and then not to think too much about the difficulties. There was generally some situation left, and you could put the difficulties aside and work on that. Besides, even if Julia was upstairs, Owen would be there to help her.

XI

IT was an immense relief to Owen that Joy did not know. He saw in her confident, innocent eyes nothing but her friendliness. It was a perfect evening, still and warm, as if the last retreat of summer had found a momentary security. The late leaves hung brittle and expectant against the pressure of the air.

Owen found Joy on the terrace. She was hatless, and he noticed with delight the way her hair grew low on the nape of her neck. Her curls were the color of buttercups, little wisps and tendrils as soft as silk and like the crook of a baby's finger pressed against her white and flawless skin. Everything about Joy reminded Owen of the country—her sweetness, her simplicity, the unarranged and sudden way in which she caught his heart with her beauty. It was strange that Julia should have overlooked so terrible a weapon. He felt extraordinarily revived and comforted as he walked to and fro listening to Joy's gay stories of the twins, the wonderful things they performed so

easily now, and the even more wonderful meanings she and Nurse attached to their performances.

What had happened while Joy was away seemed like some melodramatic and bad-tempered dream, although it was not quite a dream. He reminded

"Everything about Joy reminded Owen of the country"

himself, with an esthetic sense of the pleasure of contrast, that behind him in the house there were two other women who had taken part in his dream and known it for reality. Nina Mullory was in the library, and could see them as they passed in front of the long French windows. Owen imagined her feelings with amusement. She would

be standing looking out at them, her bad, small temper roused, like that of a dismayed kitten hunching up its back. His amusement ceased as he thought of the other woman up-stairs, who would never again give him the satisfaction of her emotions. She lay there with her impassive, frosty beauty utterly beyond his reach.

Joy was talking of Julia now, with deep praise of her in her voice, counting serenely upon the coöperation of her listener.

"I think Julia is the bravest woman in the world," Joy said with conviction.

"I am very sure of it," agreed Owen, with a laugh. "For sheer stand-up, knock-you-down courage she has n't an equal. She does n't understand fear. But do you know, Joy, I think it is easier for other people if you do."

Joy hesitated to admit that Julia had any quality which would make difficulties for other people, but she saw what Owen meant.

"Only in a way," she protested; "it much more braces you into being brave yourself. You could n't let her down."

"But if you were down," Owen persisted, "she could n't let you up. D' you see what I mean?

She has n't got any margin of mercy for other people's funk."

Joy laughed her happy, easy laughter. She did not know how many occasions life gives for courage, nor how ominous is the failure of human beings to meet them.

"Well," she said, "you need n't worry much about courage, need you?"

The French windows swung open impatiently, and Nina Mullory joined them. Owen glanced from one woman to the other; but as his eyes rested on each in turn, he thought that he was looking from a woman to a child. He was struck with Joy's light-hearted, untarnished youth; and yet Nina Mullory was as young.

"You might have told me," said Nina, crossly, "that you were coming out here. It 's beastly being cooped up in the house all by oneself."

"My dear girl," said Owen, "the world is free, and this garden very particularly at your service."

He was very nice to Nina, Joy thought. She did not realize that good humor is often the easiest way of evading a difficulty. Owen was always nice. He sank into niceness as if it were a cushion and he had rather a weak back.

"I thought," said Nina, aggressively, turning

to Joy, "that you always sat with Mrs. Ransome at this hour."

"Nina, Nina," Owen murmured softly. Aloud he said: "You don't grasp Miss Featherstone's tact. She expected me to go up to my wife, and did n't wish to forestall me; she was perfectly right. I 'll leave you to enjoy this jolly bit of summer together."

Nina tossed her head, and said something about his being dreadfully tiresome; but she could n't keep him. She had been tiresome herself, and Owen never stayed with women who became tiresome.

"He can't be going up to her," Nina exclaimed as Owen disappeared into the house. She spoke as if the idea positively shocked her. "I can't think what game he 's up to."

Joy looked at her in astonishment.

"He is n't up to any game," she said a little indignantly; "naturally he wishes to spend all his spare time with Julia." Miss Mullory stared at her. There was something in the quality of her stare that abruptly changed under the answering bewildered glance of Joy. It was as if Nina had meant to be insolent and suddenly felt a twinge

of compassion. If Joy was really bewildered, there was nothing to be insolent about.

"You know Mrs. Ransome awfully well, don't you?" asked Nina, curiously. "Really, awfully well?"

"Of course I do," said Joy; "she is my best friend."

"Well, it 's odd," said Miss Mullory, dispassionately. "Why do you think she fell off the roof of the house?"

Joy drew in her breath suddenly at this question and looked up at the roof.

"Why?" she repeated hesitatingly. Surely Nina knew the story of the accident?

The light had begun to wane. The house looked startlingly big and blank, and the roof a very long way off. Joy was struck as she had been on her first arrival with its blankness. It was a house that looked as if it had never had, and would never have, any history.

"She went up there," Joy continued obediently, "to see if one of the pipes was n't blocked, and she slipped on a dead leaf and fell."

Nina said nothing for a moment. Her eyes, too, ran over the massive, slanting roof, but without speculation.

"She fell all right," she said a little drily, "and God knows why she did n't break her neck instead of her leg. She came down there by the bushes under the library window. I suppose they must have eased her fall. Nobody saw her, you know, or heard her; she did n't cry out. A gardener

"A gardener found her lying in a little heap"

found her lying in a little heap ages after it must have happened."

Joy shuddered. It was the first time she had heard the details of Julia's accident. Some instinct in her, profound and compulsory, had stopped her asking questions.

"And Owen?" she breathed as Nina paused.

"The gardener shouted," Nina went on, unmoved. "We were sitting in the library. I sup-

pose the shutters were shut, for I can't remember hearing anything fall. When the gardener called out, Owen ran and found her. He knew she was alive because she moved, but I don't believe she said anything. I saw her being carried in. Her eyes were wide open, like a sleepwalker's, and her lips shut tight. She looked as cool as a cucumber."

"But if she was conscious at all she would have cried out," Joy exclaimed. "She would have called for Owen."

Nina Mullory shook her head.

"She did n't," she observed, with finality, "make any sound from start to finish."

Joy was silent. She tried to think of all she had ever heard about accidents and the effect of falls, and she tried not to think how curious it was that Nina did n't seem to care. She was trying to make some impression upon Joy, but not that of sympathy.

"If you were to go up there now," Nina pursued after a long pause, "I bet you anything you like you 'd not find Owen there."

Joy turned on her in a flash of anger.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What are you trying to make me believe? That Mr. Ran-

some does n't love his wife? It 's nonsense. I 've known them for years; I know all about them. Why, you 've hardly seen Julia!"

Miss Mullory stepped back as if she was alarmed by the whirlwind she had raised so suddenly out of perfect calm.

"I have seen her," she said doggedly, "once. That 's enough for me, and for her, too, I expect. I won't tell you any more. You can find out for yourself."

"You had much better not tell me anything," said Joy, indignantly, "if what you have to say is against my friends, for I simply should n't believe it."

Nina laughed. It was a contemptuous, significant laugh. It seemed to dismiss the whole question of Joy's indignation as if it was as unimportant as an ignorant child's. It was the sharpest retort she sould have made, and the most wounding. She went into the house after she had made it, leaving Joy alone.

Joy had a curious stifled feeling, as if there was n't enough air to breathe. She did n't believe Nina; she could n't believe Nina. The sense of Julia's love for Owen rested in her heart profoundly. Her friend's love was part of her life;

half her renewed and liberated happiness was because she was with them, sharing the immensity of their gift. The quiet, prosperous garden was suddenly menaced by something strange that shook her spirit. The light lingered thin and ghostly on the yellowing leaves, as tentative and insecure as human thought.

What could she know of these two lives so close to her heart, and closer to each other's? The whole material world denied all knowledge of what went on behind it. She saw and loved, and knew nothing. There was only one thing left she could do: she could at least prove to herself that Owen was with Julia.

She hurried breathlessly into the house and up the wide, shallow stairs. She never forgot the sweet, keen smell of roses which filled the hall. Julia had made pot-pourri, fresh and strong, and placed it in Chinese vases underneath the stairs.

Joy stopped for a moment outside Julia's door, with her heart beating loudly in her ears. There was no other sound. She knocked, and heard Julia's clear, unhesitating voice telling her to come in. The vast, bright room, all polish and shining, flowered cretonnes, seemed to her the emptiest place in the world. Julia lay serenely on her

high, white bed by the open window, dressed in a delicate-green dressing-gown the color of the sea. She was never idle, and she hardly glanced up from an intricate piece of embroidery she was at work upon as Joy came toward her.

Julia was not expecting any one, and she was quite alone.

XII

JOY did not dislike Miss Mullory any more. It was quite impossible for her to dislike any one who had not a home of her own, and she had found out that Nina lived in a hostel. She sat at Miss Mullory's feet by the library fire and heard all about the life of hostels.

But Nina had now had glimpses into a life which seemed built for a pleasure beyond the temporary one of getting the better of somebody else. She said to Joy with a sudden outbreak of wistfulness:

"You can't think how I like this bath here, enough hot water always, and good firm soap, and never having to do things for yourself, or sleep in sheets that look gray. I could n't believe it when I first came here, and nobody snapped your head off. It 's odd how things strike you. I was brought up in the country, and when Owen took me down here, I thought this house was like a bunch of mignonette."

Joy nodded.

"It is like that," she said. "It 's Julia, you know; everything she touches is clean and sweet."

"Oh, no," said Miss Mullory, impatiently; "it 's not Mrs. Ransome and it 's not Owen. It 's money, and don't you forget it. You can't be what you 'd like when you 're poor. Unless you keep as dull as ditch-water, you can't even be what you ought. I 'd have liked to be like other girls myself, the kind that can take their fun without paying for it. But you can't if you 're poor; you 've got to choose. Either you pay for it or you do without it, and I 'm not the sort that does without."

Nina met Joy's eyes defiantly, but there was nothing in Joy's expression on which to feed her defiance. Joy was not sure what Miss Mullory meant either by her fun or by paying for it, but she was quite sure what Nina felt: she felt at a disadvantage. This was what had drawn Joy to her ever since Owen came back. He had been at home three weeks now, and it had been Joy who contrived not to let Nina feel out of things. Owen had been so kind to Joy personally, so extraordinarily kind, that he had a little overlooked the claims of his secretary. But Joy had n't overlooked them. She had insisted always on Nina's

sharing all the delightful things they did together in Owen's free hours, and she had steadily refused the most interesting conversations if they shut Nina out. She thought that if Nina worked for Owen, it was at least only fair that he should in return contrive sometimes to let her play with him. From the moment she was there in the house, one of themselves, she must be one of themselves.

Joy had even talked to Julia about it. Julia had not been very responsive, but she had agreed that when you pay people for their work, you do nothing to discharge your personal obligation to them outside of it. She steadfastly refused, however, to allow Nina in her own room.

"She is not, you see," she pointed out to Joy, "my obligation."

In a sense she was n't Joy's, but Joy felt that any one who is not quite happy had a right to be made as happy as any one else could possibly make them.

"You 're a queer sort," Miss Mullory answered after a pause. "You 'd think I 'd hate you, but I don't. I did at first, of course; but you 're not like other girls. You don't know what 's what, and that 's a fact."

"But why should you hate me because I 'm another girl?" Joy objected. "Is n't our being the same sort of person a reason for liking me?"

"My God!" said Miss Mullory, using this term almost in awe. "You are a rum little kid! Don't you know we *are n't* the same kind of person?"

"Well, of course, you 've had more experience of life," Joy acknowledged; "you 're cleverer and you can work for your living. But I 'm going to do that if I can when I get home. I think mother 'll let me. I 'm going to train to work among babies."

Miss Mullory lit a cigarette and gazed at Joy for a moment through the smoke, but she did not follow up this interesting branch of their subject.

"I don't suppose you even know you 've cut me out?" she said slowly after a pause.

Joy blushed furiously.

"Oh, but you see," she explained hurriedly, "I am Julia's greatest friend. She wrote and asked me to take care of her house for her. I really could n't do anything else even when I found you here."

"I did n't mean the house," said Miss Mullory, significantly.

Joy thought for a moment what Nina did mean, and then it suddenly occurred to her that perhaps Nina was thinking of Owen. It was a curious way of thinking of him, because he had n't really anything to do with either of them.

"I don't really do anything for Owen," she said, hesitating a little.

Miss Mullory shut her lips firmly, as if she had determined to check something that was on the tip of her tongue.

There was something in the curly head so close to her knee that absurdly touched her. This sheltered fairy-like child, playing with unknown fires, was n't like another woman; you could n't get at her without saying something that would be an injury. If you warned her at all, you would be exposing her to the very danger she might pass safely through in the armor of her innocence. She knew that Joy had been kind to her, kinder than any one had ever been before, and she shrank from meeting this kindness with the harsh exposure of fact.

"Miss Featherstone dear," she said a little breathlessly after rather a long silence, "I wish you 'd do me a favor."

Joy looked up at her quickly.

"Oh, any favor?" she said. "Only it would n't be one, I'd be so glad——"

Miss Mullory put her request nervously, with frequent pauses, as if she were picking her way over rather a hard bit of road.

"This sheltered fairy-like child, playing with unknown fires, was n't like another woman"

"I 'd like to stay on," she said, "even though you have put my nose out of joint. It 's jolly here, and so peaceful. I 've racketed rather a lot lately, and to tell the honest truth I 'm tired. I 'm not in any hurry to go back; only, you see, he 's done with me now. I can see he 's only waiting for a chance to tell me to pack. If you could just say something about liking me to stop here, just over

Christmas, till you go—I 'm not in Mrs. Ransome's way, am I now? And I swear I would n't get in yours. Besides, it would n't be any good. It 's funny, I know, but I 'd like to be here with you."

"He? Who? Do you mean Owen?" Joy asked in amazement. "But I' m sure he is n't dreaming of your going. He 's far too kind to want to turn any one out, and, besides, are n't you his secretary?"

"Oh, I 'm that, yes," said Miss Mullory, with a short laugh. "He won't want to do me out of my job, if that 's what you mean. I 'm too useful to him, but I generally work at his office in town. What he 'll do is to tell me to go back to the hostel."

"I 'm sure you must be mistaken," said Joy, incredulously. "But I 'll tell you what I will do. I 'll get Julia to ask him. He 'll do anything in the world for Julia."

"My hat!" said Miss Mullory, with intense feeling; but she refused to explain the relevancy of this apostrophe to her headgear. She merely added, "I 'd rather you 'd do it yourself, please."

Joy agreed, of course.

There was something dancing in the air. Every

morning when she woke her heart leaped to meet the day. She knew it would be full of all the things she liked best: the twins' breakfast, long talks with Julia about home, and in the afternoon wonderful drives or walks with Owen. The days were crisp, with light frosts and sweet sunshine, sharp in flavor like the taste of an apple. They flew past her with that swift, unnameable magic which colors the world to a single heart.

She would always remember the red sunset catching up the orchard and making all the apples shine like fairy gold, and Owen leaning over a gate beside her and telling her about his school-days. It shot through her mind, while she listened eagerly, that Nick long ago in the Doone Valley had told her of his school-days, too, only it had been different then. She had not known how to listen to his confidences, and they had hurt her a little, because he was so hard in his young sense of right. He had none of Owen's delicate, tolerant humor. She remembered how fierce Nick had been about that one bad boy, the boy whom everybody liked, and who had gone, so Nick had said, through the house like rat poison. She had been so sorry for that bad and nameless boy that she had prayed about him for many years. Owen

would have understood him better, perhaps. It did not cross her wildest dreams that Owen, looking down at her with those kind and intimate eyes, had every reason to understand him best of all.

Owen never talked, as Nick did, heavily, about problems, as if they were things you could try to get right. He did not seem to think there were any problems. He mentioned Nicolas once.

"Young Pennant was in the same house that I was at school," he said lightly. "If you don't mind my saying so, he was a bit of a prig."

But Joy did mind his saying it; she could not bear to hear criticisms of her friends.

"I think he always saw so very clearly what was right," she said a little stiffly.

Owen laughed.

"Saw so very clearly what was wrong, you mean, don't you?" he asked good humoredly.

The light on the apples became fierier still under the low, red sky; they were so vivid that they looked enchanted; and Owen, leaning beside her, laughing down into her eyes, looked enchanted, too. There was something dazzling about him, as if he were more than just her friend and Julia's husband. He was beautiful and strange.

Owen joined the two girls in the library for

tea, and afterward he suggested taking Joy for a drive.

"It 'll be dark before we get back," he said, "but it 's not cold and it 's stopped raining. Do come for an hour's spin."

"And Nina?" Joy asked as usual, but Nina shook her head. She said she had n't quite finished getting the post off.

"There was something dazzling about him, as if he were more than just her friend and Julia's husband"

While Joy ran to get her things on, Owen sat quite still, looking at the carpet. He did n't seem to have anything left to say to Nina.

"Well," she said after a long pause, "I don't know what you think, Owen, my lad, but I think you 've bitten off a bigger bit than you can chew. *That* girl 's good."

Owen winced; her expressions sickened him. He

did n't want to have any of his thoughts of Joy put into words. He raised his eyes and looked at Nina with an insolent coldness.

"If I were you," he said, "I 'd learn to hold my tongue. You may find it important one of these days. What I feel or what I don't feel is none of your business."

Nina laughed disagreeably.

"That 's rather recent, is n't it?" she asked. "I 'm paid to be your secretary, are n't I? But there are some things I have n't been paid for, Owen."

"I 'd be delighted," he drawled, "at any time to write you out a check."

Nina flinched as if he had deliberately struck her; the tears sprang to her eyes.

"That was a nasty one," she muttered. "Owen, you 're about the worst I have ever come across. Don't let her find it out, that 's all."

Joy came dancing into the room, but she stopped short. Something in the air hurt. She looked questioningly from one to the other of them, but it could n't have come from Owen. He stood looking down at her with his laughing, kind eyes as if things that hurt had no existence at all.

Joy hesitated for a moment, and then she went

across the room and kissed Nina for the first time. She thought Nina must have got a little cold, because she felt her shiver as she kissed her.

Owen wrapped Joy up beautifully in the car. He drove himself, and they ran quickly through the little village and out into the wooded, empty lanes. The air was chill after the rain, but very fresh and sweet. The clouds hung heavy and low above the rusty foliage. Sunset lit the fields and hills until the world about them was like a smoldering fire.

Owen drove in silence for a long time. Joy loved the sense of his speed and skill. The intimacy between them had deepened in the last three weeks. She was aware of it all the time, but it seemed suddenly to leap into significance when they were alone. Joy had never thought it possible to be as real a friend to Owen as she could be to Julia, but lately she had felt as if she was. Owen seemed to communicate with her ceaselessly at every point; the very air was full of his friendliness, and when he sat silent and absorbed beside her, she felt it most of all. She had never known any one who was so near her own mind.

Nick had never realized what she meant, only what she meant to him. But Owen understood

her all the time, and although he was so tremendously clever, he put himself completely at her disposal, so that she understood him, too.

He stopped the car suddenly with a little jerk close to Ashdown Forest.

"I 'm going to take you to look at a favorite haunt of mine," he said. "The car 'll be all right here. Proper things on your feet? Good! It 'll be as wet as a bog."

It was growing dusk already, and was nearly dark under the close shelter of the trees. They followed a small, soaked footpath till they came out suddenly into a grove of beech-trees. The rain had begun again, but under the heavy heads of the trees they felt nothing. They stood as if inside a cloister, a million miles away from the bluster of mankind.

"Let 's sit here for a moment," said Owen, pointing to a fallen log. "May I smoke?"

Joy nodded, but she could not speak. She did not want a sound to stir the motionless serenity.

"This kind of thing makes a man feel religious," Owen said at last.

"Yes," said Joy, very softly; "it 's as quiet as prayer."

Owen looked at her curiously.

"Yes," said Joy, very softly; "it 's as quiet as prayer."

"You believe in all that sort of thing, I suppose," he asked, "religion, churches, law, and gospels?"

Joy hesitated.

"I believe," she said, "in one thing; at least I don't know even if I believe it, because I suppose believing is being what you think, is n't it, even when you find it hard? I have n't found it hard yet, but I do believe in love, Owen."

"Love?" asked Owen, his eyes rested on hers with a kindness that seemed to beseech and claim an answering kindness from her. "But that 's what I believe in, too, Joy. That ought n't to pan out very hard."

"Everybody's," she went on, "and for everything; I think it is what we can live on."

Owen laughed softly.

"You interest me less," he said, "when you make it so tall an order. Never mind, you do interest me. Only don't tell me, as you usually do, just when I 'm most counting on your liking to be with me, that it would be quite perfect if Julia was here, too!"

Joy looked at him in astonishment. For a moment she did n't like what he said, and then she realized with immense reassurance that Owen

could n't mean what she did n't like. Of course he was only laughing about Julia.

"It *would* be quite perfect, of course," she said; "that 's what 's so wonderful, Owen. I can really like you both together now; I don't have only to like you because you 're Julia's husband."

"I 'm glad you 've got as far as that," said Owen, with a mocking little smile. "Do you believe in friendship between men and women, Joy? There are people, you know, who think it can't be done. One or the other tumbles into love. That 's the idea, I take it."

"Well, they might, of course," Joy agreed, "if they were n't either of them married."

Owen said nothing at all to this; he amused himself by drawing patterns on the leaves with the point of his stick. He seemed to be very much amused, for he was smiling all the time.

"I wonder," said Joy, "if I might ask you something, Owen—something I want?"

"Don't you know," he answered, without turning his eyes from the leaf-mold he was engaged with, "by now, little Joy, that you may ask me anything in the world, and that, practically speaking, I am incapable of refusing you."

"That 's because you 're so kind," said Joy.

"I notice you hardly ever refuse anybody anything. What I want to ask you is, may Nina Mullory stay on till after Christmas? I 'm going to stay, you know, and I thought it would be nice if she could, too."

Owen did not answer for a moment; then he said:

"But what does Julia say?"

"Julia," replied Joy, "says that Miss Mullory is your secretary, and you can make any arrangements you like, of course."

"But I may n't if you won't let me," said Owen, quickly. "What do you want Nina to stay for?"

"It must be so horrid," said Joy, "to have to have Christmas in a hostel. Do you know, Owen, I never realized before that there were hundreds and thousands of girls having to live in ugly places without homes. It 's rather awful, is n't it? And Nina is happy here. She likes me now. She did n't at first, but she 's very kind about me now. I 'd like her awfully to stay."

"Then it 's settled, is n't it?" said Owen, a little impatiently. "I can't refuse you anything you 'd like. Only, Joy, quite seriously, I don't advise it. Miss Mullory is quite a good person for a sec-

retary, but she is n't a bit suitable for your friend. She might so easily hurt you."

"Oh, but, Owen, she would n't," said Joy, reproachfully. "You ought to know her better than that. She 's kind."

"She might say things you did n't like," persisted Owen. "I 'd far rather have her in London. You see how Julia behaves to her, don't you? She gives orders for her to be made comfortable and leaves her alone."

"But can you be very comfortable when you are left alone," Joy asked diffidently—"not when there 's another girl in the house being treated differently, can you?"

"Well, there you are," said Owen; "that 's just my point. Would n't it be simpler not to have her in the house? Julia would n't stand it, you know, if she were up. She 'd think it *gêne*."

"I can see that," said Joy, "because, of course, you two like best to be alone together. But just till Julia *is* up, might n't she stay?"

"She can do exactly as you like," said Owen; "but must we go on talking about her? I have been thinking ever since you came back about your eyes, and now I 've just discovered what they're like: they 're the color of very blue corn-flowers."

"Are they?" said Joy, with unembarrassed interest. "Have you noticed Julia's? They 're like a very gray wave, oh, such a deep-gray wave, just before it breaks. You can't get to the bottom of them. Tom's are going to be exactly the same." Tom was the youngest twin.

Owen said something quite unintelligible under his breath; then he broke up the picture he had made with the leaf-mold.

"Joy," he said laughingly, "when did you learn to be as wise as the children of the world when you are so markedly one of the children of light?"

"I 'm not wise at all," said Joy. "What do you mean, Owen?"

But Owen did not tell her what he meant. He only rose up rather suddenly, and walked out of the circle of beech-trees which were as quiet as prayer.

XIII

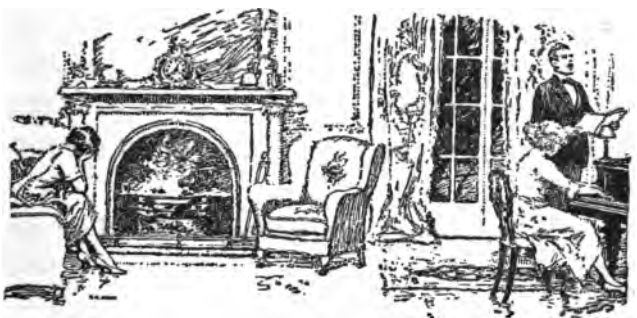
WHEN they got back that evening Joy thought that Nina must be going to have influenza. She still sat over the fire, shivering. Owen was in his most delightful mood; he asked Joy to play his accompaniments, and got out an old album full of songs. He had a light, clear baritone with a great deal of expression; all his songs were love-songs. He sang them like a man inspired, and Nina sat crouching over the fire without turning her head. Joy left the door open, and Julia's door up-stairs, so that she could hear the gay, touching voice full of ardor and supplication. She thought that Julia must feel almost as if Owen was talking to her. Joy did not dream that Owen sang only for her, that his eyes never left her face, while every nerve in him responded passionately to the extravagant praises he sent out upon the air to reach her heart.

He sang on and on, until at length the drooping little figure of Nina rose up and left the room.

Owen stopped abruptly then and closed the door after her.

"Come and rest a little," he said to Joy, drawing a deep breath. "I think I 've sung myself out."

"I want to go up to Julia," Joy objected. She wondered a little that Owen himself did not suggest going to Julia after those songs.



"Joy did not dream that Owen sang only for her"

"No, not just yet," Owen pleaded; "stay a little with me."

Joy sat down by the fire in a kind of dream; her heart seemed swung out of her body upon a tide of music. The silence of the room was full of remembered sound. The great claims and promises of love, set to such lilting tunes, besieged her imagination. All this enchanted, perilous secret was still unlearned.

Owen moved about the room restlessly for a minute or two, then sat down on the floor by the fire and leaned back against her knees.

Joy was startled for a moment by his sudden proximity, but there was something so natural in his being there that she had not the heart to move away from him. It would have seemed like an unkindness. She felt curiously tired, and just sitting there, leaning against the cushions, with Owen's head resting on her knees, was the most peaceful thing that had ever happened to her.

As for Owen, he gave a little sigh of complete content.

"I 'm in heaven," he whispered, "with one of the angels, Joy."

She hardly heard what he said. She had two opposing feelings struggling in her. An instinct that just being there close to Owen, alone by themselves, was so beautiful that it must be right; and an instinct which was no less strong, that Julia was alone up-stairs, and should n't be forgotten for the sake of any beauty.

She gave a little sigh, and slowly withdrew herself from his leaning head. Owen jumped up and stood in front of her; his breath came quickly.

"You 're not going *now?*" he asked, as if something had happened to prevent her going.

"Yes," said Joy; "I 'm going to Julia first, unless you want to go to her, then to Nina. I don't think Nina is quite well."

Owen said something that sounded very like "Damn Nina!" but one look at Joy quieted him; she was wholly unaware of any possible reason for damning Nina.

"Say you don't want to go, and I 'll let you," he said impulsively. It had n't occurred to Joy that there could be any question of Owen preventing her. She saw, however, that he was in a strange mood; perhaps all that music had excited him. So she said truthfully:

"I should really rather stay, it is so quiet here, after the music; but I do want to go to Julia, too, of course."

He let her go then, or, rather, he turned quickly and walked toward the window, and though Joy had no idea that there was anything to escape from, she took the opportunity of slipping away without further expostulation.

She sat with Julia for an hour. It was late then, so, after she had paused outside Nina's door and heard nothing, she decided Nina must

be asleep and that it would be better not to disturb her. Perhaps she was not ill after all, but the music had upset her.

Joy kneeled down by her open window. It was very dark outside, and the rain fell again, persistently, but without violence. She thought of her home, and all the beauty of the hills and sea came vividly before her. She almost heard the waterfalls whispering and withdrawing their innumerable secrets; the memory of the open moors, held high against the sky, came like a sudden freshness upon her spirit. She thought of Rock Lodge with a fixity of all her being, as if she were seeing it for the last time. Then she heard a light tap at her door. Nina entered hurriedly as if she were frightened, but for a moment or two she said nothing. Then she began to speak quickly and as if she were forcing herself to a task which was half against her will.

"I have come," she said, "to tell you something. You 've been kind to me. I don't know whether I ought to speak or not, but I can't stand it. You 've got to know. Won't you sit down somewhere, and not kneel as if you were saying your prayers?"

Joy moved a chair forward for Nina.

"You 're very tired," she said softly. "I hoped

you had gone to sleep, or else I should have come in to ask how you were."

"Sleep? No, it 's not likely I should sleep," said Nina. "Sit there yourself. I can't sit down. Has n't Mrs. Ransome told you anything at all?"

Joy shook her head.

"But if it 's something about Julia," she said quickly, "don't tell me. She herself would if she wanted me to know."

"It is n't only about her," said Nina in a quick, breathless voice; "it 's about the whole thing, and I 've a right to speak. I don't know whether I 'd better or not, but I know I 've a right. It does n't seem like a friend to have you here and risk anything, but I never have been able to make her out, anyway. I could n't expect her to stand me, but before she knew, she need n't always have behaved as if it was her business to be kind, not as if she wanted to be. There 's things a girl can't stand—what he said to me to-night. He ought n't to have said it; and then to sing all those songs—he used to call them mine—to sing them as if I was n't there. He thinks I 'm not made of flesh and blood, that 's all, or else he just does n't care.

"If a man like Owen is in love with you, he runs

blind like a horse in blinkers. It 's only you he sees, and if he is n't in love with you, he does n't think of you at all. You are n't a human being; you 're just a thing in the way. I 'm going to-morrow, anyhow. I 'm fed up. Look here, Miss Featherstone dear, do you know anything at all?"

Joy stared blankly at her, like a creature fascinated.

"Well," said Nina, "I 'm not what you 'd call respectable. Do you understand that? And it 's Owen Ransome's fault that I 'm not. I did n't mean any harm when I came here; I 'll swear I did n't. I just came for the lark; I 've been fond of him for years. It 's only been on and off, you know, on his part, but I 've stood that. You 're always having to stand something if you 're in love. He 's like that. She knows it, Mrs. Ransome does. She 's done everything to keep him, turned the house upside down, and filled it with God knows who because he likes queer fish. She 's stood by him time and time again when he 's got into a mess. About six months ago he as near as makes no matter got into the courts, but she swore black was white for him, and they believed her. I don't believe she tells lies easily; she does n't look like it. But she need n't have treated me

like dirt. I did n't mean a thing down here but to do a piece of work I could n't get him to settle to in town. He 's a wonderful head for business, Owen has; only he 's lazy.

"She came in one day suddenly when I was alone with him. It was awkward, I 'll admit, but he might have got out of it somehow if he 'd tried. Perhaps she got him into a corner,—he can't stand being got in a corner,—so he probably turned nasty and gave us both away. Anyhow, the fat was in the fire.

"She 'd had enough, poor thing; I suppose his bringing me down looked a bit too steep. I can't blame her. I 've felt like it many a time, but I never had the pluck.

"You see, dear, what happened to Mrs. Ransome was n't an accident: she meant to do herself in. Oh, my God, dear, don't faint! You 're as white as glass!"

Joy covered her face with her hands. She had queer images going on in her mind: the twins eating bread and milk in the nursery, the smart white fox-terriers running at Owen's heels,—he had a masterly way of training dogs,—the starched, stiff parlormaid impassively laying tea, church on Sunday, and the pew full of the occu-

pants of Pollards, all regular and handsome and solid. What was happening to the inside of these hollow beings? Was everything that looked so safe a bog under one's feet? Nina was speaking again.

"I could n't stand it," she repeated—"to see you here, and he starting it all up again, me not out of the house, and you her friend. Well, it was a bit too thick, was n't it? And I have my pride. He 'll chuck me for this, but I don't care now; he should n't have said what he did, not after—you do look shocking, Miss Featherstone dear. Do take a glass of water or something."

"No, no," said Joy; "I don't want anything." She rose slowly to her feet, holding on to the back of her chair. She was quite steady now, and she understood. She understood some of it, but she felt that there must be some monstrous mistake somewhere—a mistake less monstrous than the truth.

"I must go to Julia," she said. "Let me pass, please; I must see Julia!"

XIV

MISS MULLORY made an impulsive movement to catch hold of her, but Joy was gone before she could touch her.

It was nearly dark in Julia's room. She was still awake, and reading by the light of a small electric lamp; but she flung her book aside as Joy reached the little circle of light.

"My dear! my dear!" she said, "has anything happened?"

"I don't think it can have happened," said Joy, slowly, "but you must tell me if it has. Is it true, Julia? Is it true about Owen?"

"What about Owen?" Julia asked steadily. There was a peculiar tone in Julia's voice which made Joy feel as if it might be true. It was the tone of a person who knows defense is vain. Joy came quite close to the bed, but she did not try to touch Julia; she only looked at her. Her heart was in her eyes. There was nothing in it but pity —pity as few human beings ever know pity, a passion as selfless and as terrible as fire.

Joy spoke as if her own heart was a broken thing.

"O Julia," she said, "he loves you! He *must* love you."

It made Julia wince.

"You ought n't," she said, "to have come into

"She was still awake, and reading by the light of a small lamp"

this thing. Who has told you anything about Owen, and what have they told you?"

Joy could not repeat Nina's story. She kneeled down by the bed, with her eyes fixed on Julia's.

"I expect it must be everything," she said—"about the accident, and why it was n't an accident, and other women. Poor little Nina told me—poor little Nina, too!"

"Oh, don't be sorry for her!" said Julia, im-

patiently. "What 's the use of being sorry for girls like that?"

"Ah, but girls are n't like that, are they," interrupted Joy, "not first?"

Julia was silent for a moment; she wanted all Joy's pity, but she realized that there was too much of it. There was so much of it that she could n't have it all; there was even some of it left for Owen.

"Don't," she said sharply—"don't pity him! I can't bear it. I 've been a fool myself long enough. From the very first I ought to have known; Nick told me, 'Owen always had a bad weak spot; he's too viciously easy.' I could have killed Nick for saying it, but it 's true. When the ground was cut from under my feet I believed in him, and I thought, when I had to believe it, that I could pull things straight again. He did n't like all the things I liked, so I gave them up—having a real home and taking care of my babies. You must have seen how I made my life. I forced it to match his, to try to keep him; and I never kept him.

"I can't do it any more now. Something has broken in me. He always got out of every difficulty, and left me in it to stand the racket. You

see, if you think of yourself first, you can always escape. The danger is there just the same, but somebody else gets caught in it. He's never had a failure; they were all mine. But he 'll fail now, thank God!"

"What do you mean, Julia," Joy cried—"he 'll fail now? Is there anything worse that 's going to happen?"

Julia's gray eyes turned as bright as steel.

"Yes," she said. "Why do you suppose I had you here? To comfort me? There is no comfort for wrongs like mine. I did n't mean you to know all this stuff; I only meant Owen to get to care for you—and fail.

"I love you, and I risked you for that. I want him to know just for once what it is to be ashamed of your own heart. That 's what he 's made women. I knew you were safe; you 've always cared for Nick, so I played you. Don't blame me too much, Joy! I 've been turning to stone for years, and stones do cruel things. Only help me to bring it off. Don't let him know you know. He 'll be fool enough to try to make love to you. Let him know then!"

"Oh, no! no, Julia!" Joy cried out suddenly. "I think something will happen to me if he tells

me that." There was an ominous note in Joy's voice that frightened Julia for a moment; Joy had cried out as if she had gone one step beyond what she could bear. It was like the cry of some one sinking suddenly out of their depth. Julia looked at Joy in a puzzled way.

"Don't take it too hard," she said soothingly. "The worst of everything is over now. You can't go on feeling, you know, beyond a certain point."

"It is n't—it can't be over yet," whispered Joy. "Julia dearest, it 's all been so awful for you, I can't take it in yet. I 'm trying to, but I can't. It only hurts me without letting me see. I don't suppose I can ever understand *how* awful it has been for you, but it could be worse, it could be worse, if you make Owen worse. O Julia, we can't do that! Perhaps I have already, because I did n't know; but I do know now, and you love him. You don't want Owen to do another bad thing?"

"I hate him," said Julia in a suffocated voice. "He 's the father of my children, and I hate him! If I could make him suffer for a moment a tenth of what I have suffered, I 'd die happy."

"But that 's only because you love him," Joy persisted. "You would n't want to drag him into

being like you, you would n't feel so tortured if you were n't part of him. You only want him different. That 's what is so awful for you, his not being different. It 's because he is n't, because he can't be, that you 're so unhappy. It would only make you unhappier if he was cruel to me, too."

"No, no!" protested Julia. "I want him to see —you don't understand—I 'm ashamed, Joy. I 've loved him, wanted his worthless love, cried for it, hungered for it, nearly died because I could n't get it! That 's all fed his vanity. I want to see him starved as I 've been starved!"

Joy said nothing at all; she only looked at Julia.

"You judge me, Joy," Julia asked with trembling lips—"you judge *me*, and not Owen?"

"Oh, but I don't," said Joy; "I don't judge either of you at all. I love you both, and I 'm unhappy for you both."

"O Joy, I should n't have made you unhappy!" whispered Julia, and as she spoke something hard and heavy in her melted, and she began to cry. Joy took her in her arms then and held her there as if she were her child. Her pity had its way now; it sank down and down into Julia's very be-

ing. The broken phrases of Julia's hopeless grief poured out of her like some hard obstacles that suddenly give way under a flood of waters. She was escaping from what her heart had held; her bitterness receded from her, the cruelty that had risen up out of the wreck of her love, the jealous misdirection of her outraged pride yielded, and every word of her heart's bitterness as it fell from her entered into Joy's heart like a sword.

This was what love could mean: the sound which had set Joy's spirit upon those strange sweet tides, the blessed sense of unity when she and Owen were alone and near, could they deceive? These disconnected spirits, this restless agony, mistrust and broken faith, were they the end of love?

But in her heart love had no end; the cries of Julia's pain, the truth of Owen's selfishness, did nothing to shake her own amazing tenderness. She only loved them more, because she saw quite plainly there was more need for love.

There was a darkness all about her, a jangling darkness, as if she had been caught in a tunnel where there was neither light nor air; but the darkness was outside of her, it was a wall before her eyes, it had not touched her heart.

It was nearly morning when Julia said suddenly, after a long silence:

"Do what you like, then, Joy. Let him off if you like. I see what I wanted would n't do any good. I don't see how you 've made me see it. I 'm *not* sorry for him; why should I be? But I suppose you are right, since love is out of the question; it won't do any particular good simply to hate. It would only be like falling off the house to die and breaking my leg once again. I won't even do that any more. I 'll settle down and look after my twins."

Julia laughed a little hopeless, amused laugh, kissed Joy, and fell asleep.

The house was quite dark and still, and Joy was all alone in it. Nina had gone back to her room and slept. Owen slept. There was no one to share her vigil.

She crept back to her room and to the open window again. The air blew cool and fresh against her forehead. She remembered death. She had been so terrified of it for Rosemary; the thought of it had ridden her for months like a nightmare, and when it came it was sweet and delivering.

She had seen love made terrible to-night, but perhaps love, too, was innocent of the terrors

that surrounded it. What terror could there be in tenderness?

If she ran away from it and tried to escape it, would she even know that it could prove, like death, a great alternative to disaster? Her first impulse had been to go away instantly, not to see Owen again, or risk having to judge him. She would not judge him now, but she might have to stay. She must not let him think she had a horror of him—a horror so great that she had to run away, shaking the dust off her feet.

She must n't do that; she must stay until he saw that though she knew, she cared, and though she cared, she could n't ever give him what it was wrong for them to want.

She would go, then, but she could n't go before. She leaned her head low on her hands and prayed.

She did not think of herself any more. Until the sun rose out of a bank of cloud and flooded the garden with the surprise of day, she thought without ceasing of Julia, of Owen, and Nina. She drove her tired heart against their pain like an exhausted soldier pressing on under fire toward an invisible goal.

XV

IT was an uncomfortable day. The rain swept round the house in sheets, the wind thundered in the void of the sky, descending to tear down the last leaves in a savage spite, and to crash against the doors and windows with an intermittent pummeling, like the roll of heavy seas against a ship.

Owen sat in a large leather armchair before the fire. He had the "Times" spread open on his knees, but he was not reading it, and a cigarette in his mouth, which he had allowed to go out. He was in a very curious state of mind. Joy had not come down to breakfast that morning, nor was she in the nursery afterward. His whole being needed her. He felt like a castaway on a desert island hunting for a well. Unless he could find it, he was lost. Even with finding it he might be lost, but his immediate need was greater than his fear of subsequent dangers. His thirst consumed him.

Owen was no deliberate sinner; he was fastidious and light-hearted. Consequences never ap-

palled him until they happened, and privilege had usually exempted him from their happening. If it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, it is sometimes as hard for him to go into the kingdom of hell. He does not go very much farther than the portal. The devil does the rest.

Owen was quite sure that he would never do Joy any harm. She did not belong either to the type or to the class of women to whom harm comes. He did not even want to change that look of steady confidence in her eyes. He was like a child who clamors that he will not destroy his Sunday toy; only when it is put into his hands his carelessness destroys it.

Owen vowed to himself that he would not be careless this time. No woman had ever touched his heart as deeply as Joy had touched it. She believed in him with an unruffled steadiness; other women had believed in him, but they had n't made him believe in himself. Since he had known Joy, Owen felt sure that he was a better man. He was not even very angry with Nina for suddenly disappearing without a word, leaving him all his letters to answer. Many men would have dismissed a secretary for less.

Of course Owen was, as a matter of fact, deeply thankful that Nina had gone; but he had tricked so many people that at a pinch he could trick himself. He told himself now that Nina's sudden departure was very inconvenient.

He was not going to make love to Joy. All yesterday he had resisted the temptation; it was only when Joy herself was not there that he failed to resist it. He told himself that this temptation which he intended to resist was really Julia's responsibility. She should n't have put the girl in his way. She was perfectly safe, of course, but she should n't have been put there.

Better men than he would have been tempted. He saw where these better men would have fallen, and he rose superior to them, but without much conviction. Better men seldom came into his field of vision except when he was excusing himself. Well, thank God, Nina was out of the house!

In some vague, inexplicable way Owen was shocked that Nina should know Joy. He really blamed himself sharply for this unfortunate coincidence. He was not shocked that Joy should know himself.

A knock came at the door, and Joy entered. He sprang to his feet to welcome her. She had

never come to his room like this before; it was as if some wonderful answering need in her had drawn her to him, one of those inexplicable miracles of dawning love, speechless, obscure, and wise.

"I am going away," she said in a very low voice, "this afternoon. I wanted to see you first, Owen."

And then he saw her face. She had been a child yesterday, and now the child was dead. Her grave, white face had no mark in it left of her youth. Her cheeks still kept their sweet, round curves, but her eyes had lost their happy light, the young, half-opened lips were closed by sharp control. She stood there, very gentle and quiet, quite near him, and in her eyes there was neither reproach nor faltering; but he saw in a moment that she knew.

He gave a long, inarticulate sound of pain and rage. Only Julia could have dealt him this cruel stroke. She had waited until every nerve and thought of his heart were set upon this creature of his dreams, and then with a quick, ruthless touch she had set them apart forever. A feeling as hot and hard as murder rose up and shook him; but Owen could n't get rid of his pain by anger. As he met Joy's eyes, murder felt inadequate.

If she had only blamed him, ranged herself on the side of his enemies, she would at least have roused his self-pity, and not forced him to feel that he had done a worse wrong than any he had suffered. But she did n't blame him; she only looked at him as if she herself was to blame. He knew as he met her diffident, appealing eyes that the avenging angel has not a sword.

"Joy," he said huskily, "they 've told you I 'm a blackguard, have n't they? I suppose you must believe them, and if you don't believe them, I 'll have to tell you myself. You can believe me?"

She did not seem to see that this was almost like exculpating himself. He hesitated for a moment, and then he poured out to her the whole shifting, evasive history of his hunts and captures. There had been so much personal disappointment mixed up with them! So many women had failed him! They had even tried to deceive him into believing them less exacting and fatiguing than they were. There is always a great deal to be said for a man who has been too popular with women. Owen said it almost better than any one else. Women had been selfish with him; they had tried to pin him down. They had taken his charming manner too seriously. Judged by this standard of a man

of the world, he had n't really done anything particularly wrong. He had been a victim of circumstances. The circumstances had been rather too much alike, and so, it must be confessed, had the victim. Still, he had not meant any harm.

Then he swerved suddenly and took another line altogether—a line that would appeal to Joy more. He threw over the standard of a man of the world, and admitted himself the chief of sinners. He could count on Joy's forgiving crimes, and while he insisted on his guilt, he adroitly showed her that his humility was more striking still; but he found that the *élan* of these two explanations mysteriously failed him. It was as if he became aware that Joy did not attach any importance to his presentation of his sins, nor perhaps even to the sins themselves. What really had brought that look of death into her eyes was what his sins had made of him, a man she could not wholly trust.

"Owen," she said at last, as if he had not spoken, "you 'll be kind, won't you, to Nina?"

"Has she told you?" he asked fiercely, "or was it Julia?" He could feel angry again now; the perfidy of jealous women outraged his sense of justice.

But Joy brushed away his anger; she said simply:

"I 've found out such a lot of things lately, and I 've done wrong. I have made things hard for everybody. I have been very selfish and careless. I did n't know—I did n't know anything about what I was doing. But I do know now. It would help me very much, Owen, if you were nice to Nina."

Owen acted with magnanimity. He still believed that Julia had told her. He said, after a moment's pause:

"I will not dismiss her, if that is what you mean."

Joy thanked him humbly.

"There 's another thing," she said, "I don't know if I ought to tell you, but perhaps you could n't find out if I did n't. Julia loves you. She won't ever say it; but if you know it, know it in your heart, it might make things easier, might n't it?"

"Love me," he cried, "and she 's told you things that have hurt you like this! O Joy! Joy! do you call that love?"

Joy moved a little restively; she did n't like Owen's accusing Julia.

"It was my fault," she said quickly; "I made her. I asked her. If I 'm hurt, as you say, it 's because I 've been wicked. I did n't know it was wicked; it did n't seem like wickedness. It seemed so right to love. That 's why I came to say good-by. No, no, don't say anything, Owen! If you could just not say anything; I only want you to know, that some of it need n't be wicked, not if we don't say anything, and it makes us kind."

Her eyes pleaded with him. They might have won him, but she did not remember or even know the dreadful power of her beauty. She appealed consciously to his spirit, and Owen had n't much spirit; but she appealed unconsciously to his senses, and he had always let his senses have the last word in every struggle.

"O Joy," he cried, "do you mean you love me? Do you mean it as I mean it? If you do, what does all this stuff in the past matter? What does anything matter? If I 'd known you before, if I 'd met you in time, I swear I 'd never have thought of any one but you. My dear! my dear!"

"Don't say it!" she cried under her breath. "Don't say it! You 're making it all wrong!"

But he had slipped beyond his slack control; he caught her in his arms and covered her golden

head, her face, her lips, with kisses. At first he thought he had brought back the color to her lips. The frozen little figure melted against his heart; there was no resistance in her except a queer, muffled cry. He heard as he caught her to him a cry so low that he forced himself not to submit to its anguish. Then suddenly through the storm of his passion he met her eyes, and his heart failed him. There was no expression there at all. They looked straight at him like the empty eyes of a statue. Joy was not there; he had driven her far away.

He cried out in an agony of fear:

"Joy! Joy, my darling! Speak to me! Don't you know who I am? Don't you understand?"

But she made no answer. She was warm and alive, she had not even fainted; but she was not there. Her deep, unwavering eyes were like a curtain pulled down between him and her consciousness. She was in his arms, and yet he could not reach her.

Just as the room was shaken by the storm which could not enter, so his passion held and shook her, and stayed without the door of her shut soul. Without condemning him, without evading him, she had escaped.

For a few moments he continued to hold her in a frenzy of confused anxiety, but there was no return in her of any consciousness. At last he could bear it no longer. He had a dreadful sense as if he had done something without excuse. He forgot his anger; all his feelings, even his great love, seemed like childish things. He realized only his frightened need of help, and rushed up-stairs to Julia.

"Julia! Julia!" he gasped, "something happened to Joy, I don't know what! I kissed her—and she 's—she 's gone away!"

"Do you mean out of the house?" Julia cried, with an anxious look into the rain-swept garden.

"Oh, no; worse! worse!" cried Owen. He kneeled down by the bedside and buried his head in the coverlet, as if to shut out sight.

"O Julia, her eyes! her eyes!" he moaned. "She 's gone out of her mind! I did n't mean any harm; I swear I did n't mean to frighten her. I did n't know people could do things like that. I 've driven her out of it, as if I 'd taken a whip! It 's too horrible! For God's sake, do something! Do something, Julia!"

Julia put her hands quickly on his shoulders.

"There! there!" she said. "I can't stand, but

bring her here, Owen. Of course she 'll get better, and it 's almost as much my fault as yours. But she won't stay like that. Bring her here to me."

He looked up at Julia, the tears streaming down his cheeks. After all, nobody had ever taken such care of him as Julia.

"Julia," he gasped, "I 'm sorry; I 'm sorry, Julia."

It was the first time she had ever seen him really blame himself. Instinctively, she drew his head against her heart.

"My dear! my dear!" she said, "we 've done a dreadful wrong! Go quickly and bring her to me."

Joy came quite willingly, hand in hand with him, like a child; but the terrible blankness of her eyes never changed. It never changed again. For Joy had passed beyond that line, rigid and sane, which binds personality to the senses. She had been driven out, and she could not come into her earthly home again.

The twins were put into Joy's arms. She held them carefully, but she never looked at them. She did not hear words, but she never opposed the touch of a hand. Her body was as gentle and

docile as her spirit had made it; only her spirit was no longer there.

The doctors did what they could. Owen sent for specialist after specialist. They only repeated one another—a peculiar case of sudden nervous shock after a prolonged physical and mental strain. There was the illness and death of her little sister. Miss Featherstone had apparently not quite got over this before another shock superseded. They were very tactful. A few succinct words from Julia had given them the facts, and with "another shock superseded" they managed nicely. They all arrived at this conclusion, but none of them could get any further.

For a time Mrs. Featherstone took her home, but Mr. Featherstone could not bear it. He even became a little bitter about it, though he never wholly lost his faith. He simply said to the vicar that Providence had been too hard upon him.

Joy herself seemed to feel a peculiar restlessness at home. She did not sleep, so they placed her finally in a beautifully kept asylum where she could have all the care and none of the anxiety of home, and she became less restless immediately.

It was some time before the doctors in the asylum realized that Joy could be a great help to

them. Nobody ever continued to be violent in her presence. Directly Joy felt in the air the agony of a distraught mind,—and without speech or sight she seemed to feel it,—her whole being responded to it instantly. A peace, radiant and serene, soothing and strange, emanated from her. She seemed to draw out of the possessed the fury of their possession.

Owen visited her regularly at first. It was intensely painful to him, but for a long while he stood the pain of it, though he agreed with Julia that the Featherstones were greatly to blame for the whole wretched business: they should never have allowed Joy to nurse Rosemary. Then their life grew gradually comfortable again, and Owen ceased to be able to travel so far away from his business. If Joy had been conscious, he explained, he would have gone, and Julia agreed with him.

Julia had become very much softened. She agreed with Owen so often that he seldom wished for anybody else. He thought sometimes with a secret irony that if Julia had only been like this before, he might have been saved from his fatal inadvertence.

Only Mrs. Featherstone and Nicolas went regularly to see Joy. Nicolas never failed. He

came once a month by himself, and sat with Joy for an hour. She never knew him, and when he went away he was neither sadder nor happier; he was merely unchanged.

The doctor talked to him quite freely about Joy's case, because he thought Nicolas was a distant and sensible relative whose affections were not involved; probably a trustee.

"Personally," he said, "I think Miss Featherstone's case is quite incurable. Perhaps another great shock might drag her back, or rather let her out, because some of her *is* actually there. I try to get at it with the violent cases, but I can't get any further. She 's as safe as houses with them. I 've taken every precaution and tried every test, but though she deals with them directly, somehow it 's not by any method of consciousness. Not what we mean by it, anyway. I should say she was possessed, only the other way round; not by the devil, as some of these poor creatures act as if they were—but, well, it sounds a curious thing to say, by God. I often think to myself when I look at her, 'The pure in heart shall see God.' Alienist doctors have to accept strange theories, you know, we deal with such curious facts. Now, my point is, if you can accept my

theory, that your cousin is seeing God, and therefore cut off from seeing anything else."

Nicolas shook his head.

"She never did see any harm anywhere," he said. "I don't know about God; that 's not my idea of Him."

"No," agreed the doctor, "but is n't that what turns the savage cases quiet? Or if it is n't, what is? I 've tried her over and over again with all the worst and most dangerous patients. She sits there saying nothing, with that light in her eyes, and they get quiet under it. They 'd fly at me or a keeper, but she just walks straight up to them, and they don't turn a hair. They look at her as if she had cast a spell on them, and I 've seen murder and vice die out under her eyes; and yet she can't hear a word you say, and I don't think she knows the difference between my hand and a blade of grass."

"She was always like that," said Nick, huskily, "with dangerous animals, as a little child. They did n't hurt her. It took a worse thing than an animal to hurt her."

The doctor coughed discreetly. He wanted to hear more about the case; he had always wanted

to know more, but he did n't hear any more from Nicolas.

After ten years, the authorities sent for Nicolas before the day of his regular visit.

"There is a change," the doctor explained. "She has got much thinner lately, and she seems somehow—well, she was always contented, but some-

"She was sitting close by a large open window"

how happier. You 'll see for yourself. Her mother saw her yesterday and comes again tomorrow, but she does n't know any one yet."

Nick thought, when he came into Joy's room, that he had never seen any one look so much alive. She was sitting close by a large open window; the sun shone full on her golden head.

There was very little of her left but life. It came through her small, eager hands and through her eyes in a torrent of happy expectancy. She sat there very still as usual, but as if she were waiting for something—something that she longed for, and which she knew would come.

Nick stood by her side for a long time in silence, —they were alone together,—then he said suddenly:

"Joy, Joy, are n't I unhappy enough yet for you to speak to me?"

She made no answer, but she moved her head restlessly as if she were listening to something that was a long way off. Nicolas kneeled down beside her and put his head in her lap. Instantly he felt the tender pressure of her hands, and, looking up at her, he saw her eyes change. They widened for a moment, and then they suddenly grew awake.

"Nick," she whispered, "my dear, don't trouble, don't be sad; there 's nothing left but love."

She held out her hands into the sunshine and laughed. Her eyes, tender and full of joy, left his, and rested on what they saw.

Nick sprang to his feet, and as she fell forward he caught her against his heart.

She had never lived there, but it was there she died.