



SPLENDID  
JOY

MARGUERITE  
WILLIAMS

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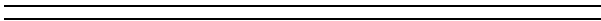
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# SPLENDID JOY

BY  
MARGUERITE WILLIAMS

*In olden time,  
God made Heaven and Earth for joy He took in a rhyme,  
Made them, and filled them full with the strong red wine of His mirth,  
The splendid joy of the stars: the joy of the earth.*

—JOHN MASEFIELD



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Splendid Joy

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*To*  
**J I M**

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*If one endure  
In purity of thought joy follows him  
As his own shadow—sure.*

*“He hath defamed me, wronged me, injured me,  
Abased me, beaten me!” If one should keep  
Thoughts like these angry words within his breast  
Hatred will never cease.*

*“He hath defamed me, wronged me, injured me,  
Abased me, beaten me!” If one should send  
Such angry words away with pardoning thoughts  
Hatred would have an end.*

*For never anywhere at anytime  
Did hatred cease by hating. Always 'tis  
By love that hatred ceases—only Love.  
The ancient law is this.*

# SPLENDID JOY

## CHAPTER I

### *PRIMITIVE MAN*

**W**ILFRED CAVENDISH was finding life very delightful. After five years of lonely farming in the States, in a spot where beauty was generous but comradeship rare, it was good to be among men and women once more.

For the past five years Wilfred, so long sheltered and delicate, had lived a strenuous out-door life. With the help of one man, he had worked a poultry farm, planted and harvested crops, mown and cured and stacked hay, and managed ducks, pigs, cows, horses, dogs and sheep. He had felled and chopped trees. He had made chicken coops. He had failed with a garden. He had dug his way through snowdrifts that imprisoned him in his home. He had nursed his animals through illnesses that the bitter winters and isolating storms had brought.

In return for the labor and the endurance, Nature had transformed the lad's delicate body into the strong healthy frame of a man; and she had given him, with the stronger body, senses more acute to feel the beauty of the world. Going across his meadows lush with wild flowers, and the fields carpeted with violets; standing beneath the massed white blossom of his cherry trees; looking across hill ranges that stretched for miles and miles between the sea and the great Hudson River; or coming back to his shack at night from a last visit to his "family", he had known something of

“the splendid joy of the stars: the joy of the earth,” and he had been, for the time, content.

But work and beauty could not wholly banish loneliness. Especially were the keen winter nights heavy with the ache of separation. He tried to fill the hours with the writing of letters, with the reading of books, and of papers that kept him in touch with the world. Sometimes he even defied the loneliness with hazy romantic dreams. But he never succeeded in finally conquering the ache and the hunger; for the passion of his young life was a man—and the man was far away.

Wilfred was still young and eager and unspoilt; and he had come back from his farming with a shy unblunted sensitiveness that might develop as a weakness or a strength. At present, simple everyday things held endless interest for him, and he found himself again in a society where life seemed in measure simple: the complicated machinery that made that simplicity possible was hidden out of sight.

In the England to which Wilfred had returned paper notes had not yet taken the place of gold; master and man had not yet exchanged ranks in a great national upheaval; mistresses were not yet deferential to their maids. The South African war had been forgotten—except by those whom it had bereaved. The Great War was still unimagined—except by the few who realised that the universal manufacture of gunpowder must inevitably be followed by a universal conflagration. It was an England of peace and prosperity. Nearly every man and woman in that luxurious drawing-room—well-housed, well-fed, well-served, well-entertained—was convinced that such peace and prosperity were for ever. Wilfred had returned to a happy world.



He found it funny, too. He chuckled inwardly at the pompous solemnity of the tall immaculate footman in silk knee-breeches—far more ludicrous to him than the awkward blunderings of his one helper on the farm, with whom he had democratically shared the warmth of the piled-up kitchen stove during bitter winter evenings, when the snow outside fell relentlessly, making them prisoners.

He found delight and amusement in studying the well-filled drawing-room, brilliant by comparison with his lonely shack. Had it not been for the man who made everything vital the comparison might have been in favor of the shack; but Martyn Royce gave life to the most conventional company, and charged the simplest situation with endless possibilities.

Wilfred watched Martyn as he talked with Lady Alwyn, and his dreamy brown eyes showed pride in this man who was his friend.

To his hostess Martyn Royce was just an interesting personality to be cultivated. At thirty-eight he had made a name, he had achieved a recognition in the literary world, for which he had tenaciously fought for seventeen years. Cavendish looked at the lean, intellectual face of the man who was more to him than any other—man or woman. Martyn was original, and, according to the verdict of the hour, a genius. But what mattered the world's verdict? To Wilfred, who had so often been lonely, this man meant *home*.

Martyn Royce—then himself unknown—had befriended Wilfred when he was a shy delicate boy, plodding through studies that were distasteful to him, and envious of the boys who played games that he could not share. It was Martyn who had given to the lad a new standard of values; who had awakened his dormant powers, and had kindled in him an

appreciation of things that many men miss. In return, Wilfred, who with plenty of money had but few friends, had given Martyn whole-hearted devotion. Now as he looked at Martyn he felt with pride that none knew his friend as he did.

Others saw the man who had attained; Wilfred knew the man who had struggled. They vied with each other for a man whom many sought; Wilfred held the secret of a man who had been often neglected and alone. These beautifully dressed women were flattered by an interest that disguised so much. Wilfred saw below the disguise and his eyes lit with laughter. They recognized the man of the world; he was seeing a wonderful friend.

Yes, it was good to be back once more, in a world of shaded lights and soft carpets, and noiseless servants; of well-dressed men, and beautiful women; a world of fragrance and harmony; a world where, best of all, his friend had come into his own....

The previous night Martyn had been Wilfred's guest, in the old Jacobean house that had been the home of the Cavendish family for several generations. They had sat together on the terrace in the moonlight, smoking and talking of many things. When at last they rose to go in, Royce put his hand through his friend's arm, with an affectionate touch no other—but Wilfred's brother, Jim—had ever known, and said abruptly:

“You remember Iva, old man?”

“Iva Charteris? Rather! Fine girl that.”

Royce gave a short laugh. He stood a few moments in silence, looking out across the moonlit garden, then he added:

“It's settled between us. The world's outside at present, but I thought I'd let you know.”

Wilfred's unselfishness rose to the unexpected occasion.

"Congratulations!" he cried. "You deserve all the luck you can get. When am I to see her?"

"She'll be at Lord Alwyn's tomorrow night."

"I shan't sleep for thinking of it! Bless you both!" ...

Now as Wilfred watched his friend, he found himself growing eager to meet the girl whom he had always thought "jolly pretty". He was generous with his homage to every pretty woman, and he had been as ready to fall in love as to cut his way through a snowdrift, or break-in an untamed colt. The only reason why the falls had been infrequent was that opportunities had been rare.

Again he looked round the beautiful room, with its softened lights, and its massed flowers; at the people who were to him but the setting for one man. How jolly life was!

Then Iva came....

Wilfred had been so long away from the world that pretends, that he was taken unaware. He caught his breath. Was this the girl Martyn loved! This exquisite fulfilment of a "jolly pretty" childhood. The boy looked at Iva with wonder in his eyes. She was his fireside dreams come true!

The exquisitely fair skin was faintly freckled; masses of auburn hair wreathed a shapely head; light blue-grey eyes were redeemed by dark brows and lashes. The soft white shoulders, the glorious hair, the shapely throat, the dainty figure, took Wilfred's senses by storm. The rich gown of pale gold satin which was cut so low, the golden shoes and dainty silk stockings, the high arched instep, the shapely arms, were all vivid parts of a picture that set every dream and memory picture in the shade.

He found himself shaking hands. Iva Charteris looked up at him with a pleased smile. She loved admiration.

“I’ve heard about your picturesque shack, Wilf; and your cherry trees; and the all sorts of wonderful things you’ve done in the wilds. I’m wanting to hear heaps more!”

He looked at her—conscious of no one else.

“I haven’t done anything exciting,” he confessed, rather jerkily, “but perhaps ... after dinner...”

She smiled, half understanding.

“Perhaps—after dinner—” she echoed.

Then they parted.

All through the long dinner Wilfred kept getting glimpses of her. He could not keep his eyes away, though he tried hard. He could not forget those white shoulders and the exquisite throat.

He drank champagne without noticing that he did so. He had never touched it before. What a wonderful place the world was. “Perhaps—after dinner—” ... What an interminable time these dinners took!... Martyn was a lucky chap! Wilfred looked across the table again, then he raised his glass to his lips....

At last he could go to her, finding her where the wonderful moonlight lured them both. Martyn was talking to Lord Alwyn and the Chancellor. For a little while the boy might have this vision all to himself. It was a heavenly night.

Iva had on a light wrap, but she had let it fall from her shoulders, and the moonlight glistened on the exquisite skin as she leaned back in the chair and looked at her companion. This handsome boy was very entertaining. She had always found him so, and five strenuous, dream-full years had vastly

improved him. Of course he seemed youthfully unpractised by the side of Martyn—Martyn whom she was going to marry; but Martyn was not handsome, and this boy had such delightful eyes.

Had Martyn told him? she wondered. Should she tell him? She looked up with a contemplative smile. Wilfred was gripping the reins of a passion that threatened to master him; for the wine was in his blood and the moonlight was magic.

“My congratulations, Iva,” he ventured, rather unsteadily. “Martyn’s a lucky chap. He told me last night.”

“I wondered,” she said slowly. Then—“Thanks very much. You’ve always been fond of Martyn, Wilf?”

For a moment the hand on the reins seemed unneeded. “I owe him more than any man living,” he answered soberly.

He looked across to the lake where the moonbeams danced. Then he turned.

“Shall we go down there?” he suggested, with half-veiled eagerness. “It looks so jolly like fairy-land. Let’s go and find the little chaps. I like to believe in them still.”

Iva rose and put her hand on his arm without speaking, and in silence they went down the broad stone steps and across the silvered lawn.

But the wine was in his blood, the moonlight was magic, and the woman....

Abruptly he freed his arm. Then he turned and looked at her.

“Put that wrap thing round you, Iva,” he commanded curtly. “You’ll be cold.”

The girl tossed the flimsy scarf farther back with a little laugh.

“I’m never cold,” she retorted, and she put her hand on his arm again.

With a fierce movement he took her hands and imprisoned them.

“Why are you so beautiful?” he panted. “So devilishly beautiful? Don’t you know that you are?”

“Don’t swear at me,” she said with a nervous laugh—but she did not free herself.

He took no notice of her words.

“I don’t care what happens, I’ll have one kiss,” he vowed, with the recklessness of newly awakened passion.

Iva looked at his flushed, eager face. She was a vain woman, but she no more understood the forces she was playing with than the child who puts his hand on the electrified rail knows that the imprisoned lightning there has power to kill.

“Well, perhaps there’s no harm in just one,” she said, with an excited catch in her voice. “We are—”

Before she realized what she had done, the boy had taken her in his arms. His hands were on her soft white shoulders, his lips were pressed passionately against her own.

Suddenly he freed her. Trembling, excited, she looked up at him, but he was looking beyond her, and all the fire had died out of his eyes.

Iva turned to see what Wilfred saw, and her excitement was charged with fear. Martyn Royce stood beside them. His face was ugly in his fury. Into the midst of the commonplace, the conventional, the humdrum, there had come once more the old, old problem of the woman and the man; the old

primitive passion, and with it the old primitive instinct of revenge.

Royce did not speak. His arm shot out with cruel strength, and without a sound the boy who had worshipped him went down under the blow.

“Come,” Martyn said briefly.

The woman shivered.

“You may have killed him,” she faltered, trembling.

“I’m afraid not,” he said brutally. “Come, I will take you home—and then I shall not see you again.”

It was not the first time that Iva had feared this man. She hesitated for a moment, but his strong will dominated. She turned at his side, and in silence they went back across the silvered lawn, leaving the boy alone by the moonlit lake—where he had gone to find the fairies.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE LONG JOURNEY*

CLARE CHALMERS lay in her bed in the long hospital ward dreamily watching the travelling sunlight. Early in the morning, when it had looked in at the eastern windows, it had shone on the doctor's table, brightening the polished glass and glistening on the shining instruments. In passing it had blessed the corner of her bed, and for a little while lay, a patch of gold, on the white coverlet. Later she had watched it travel along the clean green wall, light up the cover of the chart hanging over the bed of number eighteen, gleam redly on the shade over nineteen's bed, and now, through a south window, it was reaching her once more, glorifying the flowers in front of her on its way.

She shut her eyes, they were too tired to bear the brilliance, but she put her left hand outside the bed clothes to be caressed by the warmth.

It was a worn young face on which the sunlight rested. The brown hair it brightened had lost its sheen; the eyes that were hidden by those tired lids were despoiled of their laughter. Lying there in the sunlight, her eyes closed, her left hand bathed in the warm glow, Clare was praying that she might leave the wonderful world of laughter and tears she knew, for a wonderful world of mystery, that she did not know. Behind that still face there was passionate pleading—for it was the only thing that she wanted, and she wanted it so badly.

“Number twenty, what time's your operation?”

Clare came back to the world that she had been praying to leave and opened her eyes.



“Two o’clock,” she said, turning restlessly away from the sun and looking towards the big woman who occupied the next bed.

“Are you nervous?”

Clare smiled wonderingly.

“No,” she answered simply.

“It isn’t very serious, is it?”

“It’s only my arm—but—”

“You’ll be all right!” pronounced the woman cheerily. “But you don’t look fit to stand much.”

“I’m quite fit for a Long Journey,” Clare responded soberly; then she closed her eyes again.

The young men came and carried her from her bed to the operating room. She lay on her back, seeing nothing but the high white ceiling, not knowing who was near until she heard the Surgeon’s voice.

She felt him take her hand, and heard his laughing remark to the group she could not see.

“This is a dangerous child to tackle. If any of you fellows try it, you’ll probably come off second best.”

Then a voice, which Clare recognized as belonging to one of the students, said with laughing emphasis:

“I know.”

Clare tried to remonstrate. She was very human still, though she had been looking forward to the Long Journey.

“You’re taking a mean advantage!” she protested.

The anesthetist came to her side. She smiled up at him as she said in a weak voice:

“They’re not playing fair! You might fight for me.”

Then the strong smell of the anesthetic filled her nostrils. She forgot the Surgeon and the students, and began to wonder how long the Journey would take, and whether her prayer was to be answered.

It was not easy going. The voices fell farther and farther away and then ceased; but through her body pains shot piercingly until she felt as if she was on a rack—every limb stretched out and tortured. Then—still racked—she began to fall—down, down,—into great darkness.

And then....

The Surgeon—skilful, silent—was intent on his work, repairing the damage done to the thin arm that lay bare beneath his hand. The students watched—it was a beautiful piece of work.

Suddenly the anesthetist spoke.

“She has stopped breathing, Sir.”

The Surgeon looked up from his task. His exclamation was brief and forceful. Yes, Clare had stopped breathing.

The Surgeon gave his orders—clear, decisive. Students and nurses promptly obeyed—determined to bring back to the world the spirit that had prayed to go....

Clare found herself in an atmosphere of peace. Had she reached her haven at last?

She opened her eyes. At her side was a shining Presence, but on the radiant face there was not the welcome that the tired spirit had expected. Clare looked into the compassionate eyes; in their light she saw the self that she had left, and suddenly it appeared small and mean.

“Have you granted my prayer?” she breathed wonderingly.

“You prayed; the answer rests with you.” The Angel looked at her tenderly. “Why did you pray?” he asked.

“I had lost all I loved. Life was so lonely,” she faltered. “Was I wrong?”

“You had lost,” responded the Angel, “yes; but you had gained. You knew the loneliness of Life; but you were learning its Secret. What have you done with the great talent that you were entrusted with?”

“The great talent!” she echoed, amazed.

“The great talent for loving.”

“I loved,” she protested, “but—it wasn’t wanted.”

“Love is always wanted,” responded the Angel. “You prayed to come away leaving your work undone.”

“But—but—there was no-one left—to need me. I thought I had finished my work.”

“Finished your work! My child—you had hardly begun. You were only just learning to use the powers you had won through the long, long years.”

“Must I go back?”

Again he looked at her tenderly.

“Will you go back?” he asked. “You are given the choice.”

She hesitated, questioning his eyes. “Tell me,” she pleaded.

“Back in the world you have wanted to leave is one who needs you,” he answered. “If you return you will suffer.” He looked at her steadily. “You will have great joy, but you will suffer—again and again. But as a reward for every pain, you will have increased power to help another soul nearer to the life which is Divine.”

Again there was silence. To leave this world of peace, where the atmosphere was glorious color, where the silence was music, and where suffering was past! Clare looked into the Angel's eyes, and in them she saw the Love of God. By the light of that wonderful Love she caught a new glimpse of Life's meaning. How very small her thought had been!

"I will go," she said.

"You are right," said the Angel.

Then she was left alone....

It was evening before Clare returned to the world of normal consciousness. Vaguely, dimly, she realized that she had been turned back from the Long Journey she had passionately hoped to accomplish. She was still going to stay in this wonderful world of laughter and tears, of comedy and tragedy, of villainy and heroism; the world that held the bitterness of hate and the lilt of children's laughter. She was going to stay—but she was very tired.

The young student who had been charged to watch her, noted the signs of returning consciousness.

"That's better," he said brightly. "You'll soon be all right!"

The light of recognition in her eyes was very dim. He smiled—to fan it into a flame.

"You've been trying to hold my hand for the last hour," he said, watching her. Yes, she was coming back to the world again.

"I'm sure I haven't," she protested in a weak voice. Then she too smiled. "I'll talk to you tomorrow,"—and she closed her eyes again.

The lights were low in the long ward. Most of the patients were asleep. The student went away and left Clare alone,

after speaking to the Sister who sat by the table, the shaded electric lamp throwing light on to the report she was writing.

Presently the House Surgeon came in. Clare watched him pass quietly from bed to bed with the Sister, until they reached her own and paused there....

Once again the ward was still, but Clare lay restless, unsleeping, full of pain. Vaguely, dreamily, she followed the passage of the moonlight, as she had followed the passage of the sunlight in the morning. Presently that light too reached her....

A few miles away Wilfred Cavendish was lying by the moonlit lake where he had gone to find the fairies. That same moonlight was welcoming Clare Chalmers back to the world—where she had come to find her work.

## CHAPTER III

### *THE HAND OF A MAN*

CLARE was sitting in Mrs. Hulbert's most comfortable garden chair, on the green slopes that led down from the cottage to the yellow sands of the Bay. Her right arm was still imprisoned in splint and bandages, and supported by a sling; but each day she was reclaiming a little more of her old faculty for enjoyment; feeling a little more keenly the charm of the grand old sea—of the shimmer of sunlight—the glory of clouds, and all the thousand beauties blessing the cottage by the Bay.

Life was still bounded by pain; but Clare knew that pain was not its end. She faced the unseen in faith.

The book that she had intended to read lay unopened on a chair beside her. She was idly watching a sailing vessel out in the Bay. The boat was making for the shore below the cottage, its white sails gleaming in the sunlight, its prow cutting a clear course homeward through the blue waters.

Clare knew the owner. He always stopped for a word with Mrs. Hulbert or her husband when he came for his boat. When he went fishing, the cottage profited; when he went out only for the sake of defying a storm, Mrs. Hulbert moved restlessly between her work and the window until she saw that he had returned in safety.

She had known him for years, she told Clare. He was so straight to deal with. He would never be imposed upon, but he was so wonderfully kind to the people he trusted. That morning had come the comment that at last roused Clare to interest:—

“I always feel that he’s sad. Don’t you think that it’s in his face?”

Clare, who had never thought of studying it, decided that she would begin—blaming herself that she had so long submitted to pain’s self-centering bondage.

Once or twice the yachtsman had spoken to her—after Mrs. Hulbert’s motherly introduction. He had been no more than distantly courteous, and Clare’s thoughts had not followed him when he went.

Now she was feeling very sleepy. She watched the boat steering a straight course towards the shore; she saw the sails lowered. Her eyes closed. She needed sleep so badly; yet she dreaded it—for always, as a preliminary, she seemed once more to be on a rack, and then, still racked, to be falling down, down, endlessly, as she had done on the day that she had tried to take the Long Journey and had been turned back. Her sensations on waking were ever the same; it was as hard for her to leave sleep behind as it was to reach it.

So, tired as she was, she dreaded losing consciousness. The chair was so comfortable—the sea breezes fanned her cheek—everything was still; she could rest.... Had the boat come home? She would not trouble to look again.... Dreamland was very near.... But before sleep could carry her safely there, the old agony returned, thrusting her back.

She did not know that a strong man was watching her, with the keenness of an understanding sympathy. He knew the meaning of those nervous tremors, and he knew his own power to still them. Yet he hesitated.

As he watched, another tremor shook her—and Clare opened her eyes.... Yes, the boat had come home, for its master was beside her.... He hesitated no longer. The shudder

was only momentary, for a steady cool hand closed over the trembling one, and the girl found herself growing still.

“You are quite safe,” the man said quietly. “You can rest now.”

For a moment Clare looked up into his face, and as she looked her fear fled. Without a word she closed her eyes once more, and trustfully, peacefully, she slept.

Until the danger of the terror was past, Martyn Royce sat beside her, his steady cool hand on hers.



## CHAPTER IV

### *A SAIL IN THE SUNSHINE*

“**W**OULD you care to come for a sail this morning?” Royce spoke casually, but his keen eyes were studying Clare’s expressive face. She flushed with undisguised pleasure.

“It would be delightful,” she responded without affectation. “It’s very kind of you.”

He gave a short laugh.

“Oh, no, it isn’t. I’m getting rather tired of my own company, and I hate being bored.” He looked at her thin dress. “Go and put on a warm coat,” he commanded, “we shall get the breeze out there; and put something on your head that will stick.”

She laughed happily as she turned to obey him. It was delightful to have someone telling her what to do.

“I’m going for a sail,” she explained, putting her head into the kitchen where Mrs. Hulbert was shelling peas.

“That’s right!” agreed the kind woman heartily. “It’ll do you a world of good.”

She rose, lifted the top from the stove, tossed the pods out of her apron into the fire, and bustled to the door. “I’ll help you into your warm jersey.”

“I shan’t need to be waited on much longer,” Clare asserted as they laboriously got the wounded arm into the sleeve. “The splint’s coming off directly. Won’t it be just lovely to be able to do my own hair again!”

She pulled her little hat over her brown curls, then ran down the narrow stairs as she had not since she came.

“Take care of her, Mr. Royce,” Mrs. Hulbert said, following her into the porch. She patted Clare’s arm affectionately as she looked at him—quite unconscious that he knew exactly how far she had got in her speculations.

“All right,” he said lightly. “But don’t worry if we don’t come back!”

They went down the golden sandy shore, Clare’s eyes on the blue waters—seeing only sunshine; the motherly woman looking after them—seeing orange blossoms.

“Are you comfortable?” Royce demanded, as Clare sat back against the cushions that he had put ready.

“Perfectly,” she said contentedly—and the boat shot out seawards.

Royce moved about for a few minutes, manipulating the sails, then he came and sat beside her and took the rudder.

“Now you have to talk to me,” he commanded, looking at her with a smile.

Could this be the man who a few days before had been a stranger?

“Not easy,” she said, answering his smile. “If you knew how outside everything I have been for the last year you would understand how difficult.”

“Have you been outside things?” he asked, with interest.

Clare’s eyes were on the wind-filled sails. Her happiness was obvious.

“For months and months I spent my days between the reading room of the British Museum, a typewriter, and an old grumbler,” she said; and her voice was glad because those

days were past. “Now—listen! The swish of the water—the rush of the wind in the sails! Do you know what heavenly sounds those are?” She looked up at him. “You can’t know how heavenly unless you knew the typewriter and the grumbler.”

“It’s worth the wretched old things, isn’t it?”

“Quite!” she agreed emphatically.

He rose and trimmed the sail. Clare trailed her left hand in the cool water.

“Didn’t the reading room make you very wise?” he suggested.

“I was only gathering straw there—to make bricks for the building of an historian,” she explained.

“Then you breathed into them the breath of life?”

“I am very sorry—but I didn’t. He wanted nothing but bald political facts, cold dates and the strategies of kings in battle. Those are not history.”

“You’re right! No wonder the modern historian is not a ‘best seller.’ Gibbon, Macaulay, Froude and the men who made history live, never lacked a public. So you were limited to making bricks—all day?”

“Yes.” She hesitated; then she added quietly, “The evenings were beautiful—but sad. My sister was ill—for a long time.... So you understand that I am all behind. I hardly know what’s been going on in the world. I don’t know what plays have been running or have failed. I don’t know what stars have risen or set. I don’t know what musical geniuses have been discovered. I don’t even know what new religions have been born and died.”

She lifted her hand and held it up in the sunshine, watching the sparkling drops.

“It will be so exciting catching up,” she explained with a bright laugh.

“You’ve got the things that really count,” he asserted—offering no sympathy, “and everything costs.”

“How do you know that I have?” she asked in surprise.

“One can see that,” he said quietly. “How long are you going to enjoy these heavenly sounds before the wretched old typewriter clicks again?”

“It may be a new one,” she suggested, putting her hand back in the water. “I’ve said good-bye to the old one—the wretched old one—for ever; under compulsion, because my arm got smashed.”

“That’s something to the good!”

Clare laughed happily. “Yes,” she agreed. “It’s ever so exciting not knowing what’s going to happen next.” She did not mention the hours when the thought of her laggard health and her tiny dwindling capital hung over her as a cloud, and she could not feel the excitement of the game; but perhaps Martyn Royce understood.

Clare looked away to the rugged coast that they were passing; to the steep jagged rocks—the cliffs beautiful in purple and gold.

“Aren’t you glad you’re alive?” her companion demanded.

“Yes,” she assented, looking at the distant glory of gorse and heather. “Isn’t it a lovely world!”

Royce tucked the apron round her and smiled into her eyes.

“You’re just a kid!” he exclaimed, amused.

“I often feel sorry for the medium-rich people with a settled income,” she remarked contemplatively, sharing her thoughts in friendliness. “It’s so much more thrilling to fight for one, and see it grow—both ways.”

“Most people who see it grow—small—don’t look at it in that light,” he responded, screwing up his eyes against the glistening water.

“But there’s always more than one way of looking at a thing,” she reminded him, superfluously. “That’s another reason why life’s so exciting—it gives you a big choice.”

Clare had never doubted life’s interest, even when she had most dreaded its sorrow.

“A big choice of what you will have?” he challenged, suspecting that she had had little.

“A big choice of the way you will take what you have,” she amended.

“I choose, too, what I will have,” Royce declared; and the girl wondered whether he had yet known defeat.

“Men are freer to choose than women,” she suggested.

“Oh, nonsense! Make up your mind what you want and then go for it.”

“Suppose that when you’ve got it, it isn’t what you thought!”

“You should make sure first. But anyway, you’ve taken the risks. You mustn’t grumble. You’ve had the excitement of the chase, and you pay, that’s all.”

He looked across the water—shorewards.

“Hullo—you see that boat, she’s trying to race us! She means to be round the point first, and she’s full sail on. Now for it. I bet we win!”

The vessels were sailing on the wind. The one that had attracted Martyn's attention was pointing more directly for the head that they were making for, but very soon Clare realized that the sensitive hand on the tiller beside her belonged to an expert who knew his boat.

The light of the race was in Martyn's eyes. The wind whistled in the canvas. Clare's brown curls were tossed about her eyes, the salt spray was flung against her cheeks. The boat raced along—the water rippling over her lee-side. A little pool began to grow in the lap of the apron. Clare laughed—because the world was so beautiful. She looked at her companion. His eyes were bright. He was looking away to the yacht that had attempted to get ahead of him. Slowly she was being left behind. Steadily the distance between them lengthened; nearer and nearer came the point they were making for. It was difficult to beat Martyn Royce.

“She'll sail too near the wind if she doesn't mind,” he exclaimed. “Good! I knew that she would”—he added with a smile of satisfaction, as they rounded the head, leaving their rival behind, with sails flapping. “Perhaps he'll like to try again!”

He emptied the little pool of water from the lap of the apron.

“Are you enjoying it?” he demanded.

“Perfectly!”

“Yes?” he inquired.

“What?” she asked doubtfully. He was too keen.

“You were going to say?”

“I wasn't going to say it—” she laughed.

“Oh, do. I'm interested.”

He turned the boat homeward.

“I was only thinking it strange that a day or two ago we seemed strangers.”

“And now we seem friends, you mean?”

“Well, yes,” she admitted.

“I shouldn’t count too much on that,” he said seriously. “People are so different when you know them.”

“Always?”

“Always!—I have very few friends.”

She did not look at him, she was wondering about his life.

“Should I find you very different?” she questioned.

“Oh—yes; you haven’t seen the scoundrel yet.”

“I don’t think I ever shall,” she laughed.

“At least don’t say you weren’t warned! Dear Mrs. Hulbert will be getting anxious. It’s just as well not to alarm people too soon,”—and he steered for the shore. “You must come again tomorrow,” he added, as he helped her out on to the sand.

“Thank you,” she said frankly, “it’s been lovely.”

“It’s better than drugs anyway?”

“Heaps!” she agreed. Then she went up the slope to the cottage.

Royce went on alone, but this time Clare’s thoughts followed him.

For three weeks she had seen him nearly every day, and she had hardly given him a thought. Then without warning he had quietly entered her life—as a vital human being to be thankful for. When she had shrunk before the dread of returning, sleep-destroying pain, his hand—the hand that had

before been that of a stranger—had grasped hers; the dread had gone, and she had rested in safety. Now he had given her more....

In the evening the aspect of the sky changed. The distant cliffs were wrapped in mist. The sky hung heavy and grey before them. The grey sea was rising into a storm.

But the light was still in Clare's eyes. She was seeing the sunlight on white sails; she was hearing the lap of breaking water; and as she fell asleep—healthfully tired through the buffeting of the breezes—she had the memory of a strong cool hand on hers.

What did the storms matter?



## CHAPTER V

### *A FRUITLESS ERRAND*

THE days and weeks that had been generously restoring health and hope to Clare—that had been filled with an irritable dissatisfaction and unacknowledged loneliness for Martyn—had been dark and leaden for Wilfred Cavendish.

When he came to himself by the moonlit lake, he seemed to rise another, weaker, personality. He imagined that life had been despoiled. He was so young that he thought a blow had power to shatter a world. Yet in spite of his misery he realized that in the society to which he had returned appearances must be kept up, though the love of years should have been destroyed in a moment. He managed to get away from Lord Alwyn's without attracting comment. As he drove his car through the moonlit roads and lanes the brief untimely passion lay consumed. There burned in his brain only anger and remorse.

When at last he turned into the drive of the long low house—where twelve-year-old Jim was surely sleeping—Wilfred felt thankful that there was no one about who had the right to question him. Painton—the elderly, correct butler, who had been in the family longer than Wilfred—kept his place. His wife reigned supreme in her own domain. She mothered the motherless Jim; she did not intrude upon his brother.

For a moment Wilfred's bitter thoughts were caught into another channel. He must never let Jim know what had happened; for Jim loved Martyn too, and he could not hurt

Jim. Then his thoughts circled narrowly again—shutting life's splendors outside.

He sat for a time alone, brooding. There was no wise friend to show him:—How good it is to live! How good to feel the tugging of the leash as manhood's awakening forces show their power: how good—when one is young, and strong for battle. No friend—for Wilfred was alone.

Through a long night he tossed wakeful on his bed. Again and again he pressed his hands over his burning eyes in an effort to shut out the vision of Martyn's face as he had seen it before the blow fell. Presently, as that vision continued to haunt him, there flamed in the boy's heart a fierce hatred that scorched; but it was not Martyn whom he hated—Martyn who was his friend, and whom he had wronged—but Iva, the woman who had tempted him with her beauty, and who was too limited to understand the passion she had roused.

Life had been a peaceful, wholesome, beautiful thing to Wilfred Cavendish. A strenuous out-door existence had helped him through the years of earliest manhood. His mind had been kept healthy by work, and by the honest thought-provoking books that he had read—often at Martyn's suggestion. Then, in a moment, his accumulated strength had failed him, his loyalty had slipped away, and—crowning deception—the passion that wrought the havoc had itself fallen dead; taking into forgetfulness the momentary bitter-sweet delight.

Still Martyn remained—but Martyn turned into an enemy.

Early the next day Wilfred motored over to see Martyn. Whatever it cost him, he must find his friend again. He had no thought now for Iva Charteris—he cared only for Martyn. But he could not reach him. Mr. Royce was “not at home.”

Wilfred interpreted the statement by the darkness of his own bitterness.

Again and again he tried—always with the same result. He wrote, but his letters were unanswered. A telegram was returned to him with a line—“Mr. Royce is away. We do not know his address.”

Wilfred avoided his friends; he broke his engagements. This was his first great trouble and it filled all his thoughts. It made him an egotist and played havoc with his self-control. He put all his nervous energy into discovering where Martyn was; he left none for the joy of living. His days were burdened with one idea—how to find Martyn—how to win back his friend.

At last, on the morning when Clare entered upon a new world of sunshine by way of a small sailing boat, Wilfred succeeded in discovering the bungalow. When Martyn returned after leaving Clare at the cottage, he saw Wilfred's car at his gate. As he entered the lounge the eyes that had smiled happily into Clare's were hard—as Clare could not have imagined them.

Wilfred had been standing at the window. He turned as Martyn entered. His sensitive mouth twitched—his dark eyes showed hours of sleepless brooding. Martyn closed the door and crossed the room.

“Why have you come?” he said curtly.

“Martyn”—faltered the boy brokenly, and he held out his hand.

Royce took no notice of it.

“Why have you come?” he demanded again; and Wilfred's desperate hope shrivelled. He tried to hold on to it, but it had

no life.

“I wanted to tell you that I am more sorry than I can say.” His hand dropped to his side. His eyes sought the hard ones before him, trying to find in them a glimpse of the friend he had lost.

“Your sorrow doesn’t interest me in the least,” Martyn said coldly, taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it.

“Martyn,” pleaded the boy, “why are you so hard? I would give worlds to undo it.”

“That’s childish! You know that you can’t.” Royce strode across the room and threw the burnt match into a pot of fragrant mignonette. “You’d better go,” he added.

“You ought at least to give me a hearing. You never answered my letters.”

“I didn’t read them.”

Cavendish turned to the open window. His lips were trembling. He was feeling impotent. But he must hold on to his self-control. Suddenly he remembered the woman. “You are not being fair to Iva,” he said shakily—trying to gain time. “It wasn’t her fault.”

Martyn’s eyes were cruel.

“Not fair!” he echoed. “That’s splendid from you. If you have come as advocate for Miss Charteris you may just as well understand at once that her opinion of my fairness or anything else of mine is a matter of absolute indifference to me.”

“I’ve never seen her since that night,” Wilfred retorted bitterly. “I’m not her advocate. It’s for myself I’ve come.”

“And I have shown you pretty plainly that you’re not wanted.”

“You mean you’ll never forget?”

Royce shrugged his shoulders.

“Are you going?” he demanded.

Then the pain—the morbid brooding of the past weeks—the love that had been given and was now thrown aside—the passion of the moment that had fallen dead—all were forgotten, and in their place there rose that ugly, poisonous thing that takes the joy from life, that keeps wounds open, that bars all roads to peace.

“Yes, I’m going,” Wilfred said passionately. “Probably to the devil, but that won’t matter to you! You are brutally strong, but you’re not infallible. When your strength gives out, I hope there’ll be no one by to help you on to your feet again!”

“I suppose you prefer to walk out,” suggested Royce.

For a moment Wilfred looked into the hard eyes, with hatred in his own, then he went—banging the door behind him.

Once in his car he recklessly broke all speed limits. The glory of the gorse and the heather mocked him. Houses and trees and hedgerows flew madly past in a dazzling sunlight. The shadows lengthened—night fell; but for him there came no mists to shut out the world—the night was blindingly bright, cruelly beautiful. Across the broad open moonlit plain the car sped at fifty miles an hour. Rabbits, fascinated by the brilliant glare of the lamps, rushed from their safe resting places and could not get back. Wilfred laughed at each jolt that told him that a tiny dead body was left behind on the road.

It was long past midnight when he at last reached home. Painton appeared in the hall as his master's key sounded in the lock.

"What can I get you, sir?" he asked, as he took Wilfred's hat and coat.

"Bring me some whisky," the boy ordered; and he walked unsteadily into the morning room where a fire was burning.

Painton hesitated. Then he obeyed.

"I shan't want anything else. Don't bother me again.... Confound it man—what are you fiddling with! I'll move that lamp if I want it. Do for heaven's sake leave me alone."

Painton, who did not know this new Cavendish, went quietly out of the room; but he did not go to bed.

Wilfred poured out whisky—and heard demons laughing.

Presently Painton returned. A half empty tumbler stood on the table at the boy's side. Without comment the butler took the decanter from the table. Wilfred turned a flushed face towards him and laid a trembling hand on the glass.

"Haven't you ever wanted to get gloriously drunk?" he stuttered, with a foolish laugh. "There's nothing like it. Wonderful stuff! Have some, man?"

Painton put down the decanter out of reach.

"Confound your interference! I've a perfect right to go to the devil if I want to. Bring that back!"

"Oh, no, you haven't sir," contradicted the butler quietly. "You don't belong to yourself."

"You canting old Methodist! I'll do as I darned well choose." Wilfred lifted the tumbler and drained it, then his head fell forward.

“Painton,” he muttered thickly, “you—can’t—keep—the—devil—away.” Then with sudden fierceness: “I hope he’ll curse Martyn, too.” He began to sob.

While Wilfred was cursing and Clare blessing him, Martyn Royce was equally forgetful of both. He had spent a strenuous afternoon writing—his sole anodyne for every pain. He did not know that he had steeped his pen in gall—until the worst of the bitterness had been exhausted.

If Martyn had never cared for Wilfred—never been so sure of his loyalty—he would never have been so brutally hard. It was not because he had lost the woman, but because he had lost faith in the man, that he was unforgiving.

He had given little thought to Iva; her feelings were of no moment. He had seen her face in the moonlight before Wilfred’s mad kisses had been pressed upon her lips, and in that moment he had known that he had been lured by a mirage; it could charm him no longer.

After Wilfred went he worked—to forget. He was not weak enough to be sorry. He was not great enough to forgive.

Had Royce lived in the middle ages, he might have died as a martyr—not because of his faith in a creed, but because of his faith in himself; but he would have jeered at his tormentors as they racked him—they would not have seen his pain....

When twilight fell, he went out into the mists. He walked for miles—fixing his thoughts on the book that he was writing, and banishing human passions by the effort of his strong will.

But into the midst of his leashed-in thoughts there flashed uninvited the picture of Wilfred’s brother Jim—the plucky little lad with the true blue eyes, and the tossed wealth of

golden hair. Jim was far more fragile, yet far, far stronger, than Wilfred had ever been. As Martyn thought of Jim, he felt sorry at last. He hoped that Jim would never know.

Suddenly his sombre thoughts took flight, banished by a new interest. From somewhere away to his right came the long, mournful howl of a dog. In an instant everything else was forgotten. No animal ever appealed to Martyn in vain. He took his electric torch from his pocket and, guided by its light, made his way across the mist-mapped fields in the direction of the sound.

In a few minutes he had discovered the Aberdeen terrier whose cry demanded his help. As he stooped down to find the cause of her trouble, the dog, mad with pain, turned and bit his hand. Martyn caught her lower jaw firmly, and holding her trembling body against his side with his arm, he gently and skilfully freed her paw from the cruel trap that had imprisoned it. Then kneeling down in the mud, the dog's damp body still pressed against his own, the mist enfolding them both, by the limited light of his torch he bound his handkerchief tightly round the wound, while he quieted the trembling of the frightened creature—soothing her with a tone that she could understand.

The address on the collar told him that her owner lived about two miles away. Royce lifted the dog, put the torch back in his pocket, then tramped those miles through mud and mist, the dog under his arm, her rough head against his breast.

Wilfred Cavendish—making for home, reckless of speed limits—was trying to curse that man who had been his friend; Clare had fallen into a peaceful sleep, a blessing for him on her lips; the shaggy wire-haired terrier tucked under his arm



endeavored to turn her head that she might lick the hand that she had wounded; but Martyn strode on grimly—indifferent to curse and blessing and penitence alike.

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE JOY OF THE EARTH*

CLARE sauntered along the cliff path, dreamily trying to balance her gains and her losses. She found the gains so great that in the end the scales were abandoned.

The sun had ceased to shine and there was a slight drizzle, but the damp air was sweet with the scent of bracken and fir; the loss of the sun was forgotten! She was not strong yet, but her arm was free from splint and sling; decided gain! Her money was dwindling fast, but around her were a thousand things that were free;—the grand view of rugged rocks, grey sea, cliffs beautiful in purple and gold, and, through the misty air, the peaceful sound of the church bells calling to worship;—never mind the money! She had no work, but she had her freedom! Down went the scale on the profit side once more. She had not gained Heaven—which side of the scale should that go? She had come back to Earth—and Earth was very beautiful.

The church bells sent their music seawards—an endless Hallelujah!

She sauntered on—joy in her heart. On the one side, the narrow cliff path was bounded by rough rocks, jagged and irregular, which led downwards to the sea, and on the other, by green slopes decked with golden gorse and purple heather that would be a radiant glory when the sun should shine once more. The distant cliffs were wrapped in mist. The path turned and wound continually, and every turn led on to new beauties.

On the top of each ridge Clare met the strong, boisterous wind, then, as the path descended again, the rising slope beyond broke its force. Her strength was still limited and the buffeting nearly exhausted it. She left the path and climbed a little way down on the rocks, to a ridge about fifty feet above the rough, surging waters. The sea was swirling and breaking below, and all around were the jagged, broken boulders, and behind—beyond the path that she had left—rose the green, gold and purple slopes.

She sat on the rock, looking down at the tossing waves and listening to the music of the church bells carried faintly on the breeze—until the bells ceased, and the echo of an Angels' chorus came to her through the swirling, breaking water below.

Clare's face was still thin—her eyes a little wistful; but a healthier color was in her cheeks, her eyes were getting back their light, her brown hair was regaining its lustre; and her old keen interest in her fellow creatures, and in the life all around her, was coming back once more. An endless Hallelujah!

The girl had not yet come to recognize that the bringer-in of the new, vital interest to the life that she had wanted to leave, was the man who but a week before had been a stranger—the man whom Wilfred Cavendish had known as able to electrify the most humdrum situation with endless possibilities.

Mrs. Hulbert's imagination took further flights, her kind eyes smiled more frequently, as she saw the two together, in sunshine and shower. But Clare had no thought of love; she only felt that the world was full of beauty, and life a wonder of new interest, and that her strength was coming back. To

her, Martyn's friendliness was just the kindness of a strong man for a fellow-creature weaker than himself. How did he understand so well? She wondered. For she knew that it had been a keen understanding sympathy, and that only, which had made him stretch out a hand to clasp hers, that day when nervous tremors shook her and returning agony banished the longed-for sleep. She had been sinking into the deeps of pain, and then—he had been beside her; his strong cool hand had closed over hers, and the darkness had lost its terrors.

Now each day he was helping her back to strength, to thrilling, vital life once more. In her heart was a gratitude so great that it brimmed over through her eyes for all to see. The stronger Thing that was growing there beside it she did not recognize. Clare knew that the gorse was a more glorious gold—that a new beauty had been added to the wonder of the sunset—that the bitterness had been taken from past memories—and the fear out of future shadows; the Magician who had wrought these miracles stood by unrecognized. But Love can afford to wait with a smile for he knows that his turn will come.

Clare sat alone in a great peace. Away above the sea there appeared one narrow stretch of blue. She watched it. The blue spread. A silver line appeared on the edge of the mist. The sunlight broadened until it had burst through the clouds. Suddenly it was free. The light came straight and dazzling into the girl's eyes. She heard a sound of slipping stones behind her, and turned—the light still blinding her, and through that light, indistinct but radiant, she saw Martyn Royce. He sat down at her side. The sunlight had triumphed.

“I thought that you would have gone to church,” he suggested.

“Not to a church with walls,” she explained, still dazzled by the light.

“Why haven’t you?” he demanded.

“I haven’t gone back to old habits yet,” she confessed. “I shall soon, I hope.”

“I’ve given up going. There’s so much rubbish talked there.”

Clare looked at the broadening blue.

“Not in all,” she protested.

“In most,” he declared. “The world has outgrown them.”

He took from her hand the book of verses that she had not opened.

“Some of those are beautiful,” she suggested, not offering her knowledge of a church the world has never seen.

“Seventeenth edition and only published a year! I hear that they are quoted from nearly every pulpit in the land.”

He turned over the pages and read in silence for a few minutes. Clare watched him critically. He looked intellect personified. She was hardly surprised at his verdict.

“Just sentiment!” he remarked concisely—closing the book.

“Sentiment—of the right sort—is essential.”

He laid the book in her lap.

“You don’t get that sort of sentiment in the Bible,” he said unexpectedly. “All our modern religious writings are just piffle by the side of the Sermon on the Mount.” He shaded his eyes with his hand and looked across the sea. “We laugh at that because it is so impossible—it makes us all so paltry.

That”—and he looked at the book as he snapped his finger and thumb disdainfully—“Pap!”

Suddenly he turned to her with a smile.

“Are you glad to be alive?” he demanded again.

She returned his smile.

“You asked me that before.” Then she confessed, “I wanted not to be, a little while ago. I wanted to go, more than I wanted anything. I hoped that I should.”

“Ah! There are more who want that than you imagine. But we must stick to our posts till we’ve done our work—and it’s worth while. I don’t expect much for myself when I quit this life—I’m too big a sinner, but there are a few one is given a chance of saving, even if one can’t save oneself, and it’d be mean to leave them in the lurch.”

Clare was silent. This man was continually surprising her—he had so many sides.

“Did you expect to travel by the easy anesthetic route?” he asked suddenly.

“Yes,” she confessed—her color deepening.

His eyes were studying her face with an expression of amusement.

“And did you have a talk with a parson first?”

Clare laughed suddenly.

“I never thought of that!”

“What did you do then?”

“I only had a tussle with the Surgeon and the anesthetist.”

“Unorthodox,” he remarked.

Her eyes grew deeply grave.

“I never thought about that,” she said slowly. “The other world always seems so very near. It’s so natural just to go on, and it must be so exciting!” she added.

She turned back once more from the broadening blue.

“You know we go on?” she questioned, almost wistfully.

“Of course!” he said, emphatically. “But equally of course our bills come in.”

He shifted his position on the rock, and clasped his hands round his knee.

“We’re too sentimental now-a-days,” he insisted.

“Everything’s made too easy. Ugly things are smoothed over, when they ought to be brought out into the light and fought.”

“It’s better to emphasize the good than the evil,” suggested Clare—studying the face in which justice predominated over mercy. “Better to show up beauty than ugliness.”

She was surprised at the tragic earnestness in his eyes.

“You think people have only to see virtue to love it?” he exclaimed. “Once Virtue became incarnate and the world drenched It in blood. You imagine the world loves a beautiful character! Don’t you remember that the most beautiful character that this world has ever seen ended on a gibbet?.... And we are all great sinners still.”

Clare looked away with misty eyes. All her achievement of goodness suddenly looked so paltry; all the possibilities for good and evil in man so incomprehensibly great.

They sat in silence for a few moments. When Martyn turned to her again his expression had changed.

“Why did you want to go?” he asked quietly.

Clare hesitated, but his eyes drew her on.

“Do you want to know all about it?” she asked shyly.

“It does one good to talk sometimes,” he explained—“even to a sinner.”

“I don’t think there’s much to say,” she said slowly.

His eyes were on her face. He was looking as if he cared, and so she told him.

“For a good many years my sister and I were alone together. Once there was a big family, but it had grown small. We were not really lonely—though people were always expecting us to be—because we cared so much. She had a post as governess to some small boys. I was secretary to a retired politician who”—she paused—“who was not a gentleman,” she concluded, her eyes steadily fronting the sea.

Martyn’s face darkened. His knowledge and his imagination were so different from hers.

“I told you I made bricks,” she reminded him. “But he didn’t know how to use them. He only decided to be an historian because he failed in politics.”

“Poor old England!” commented Martyn with a short laugh. “And you?”

“I should have left him, but Olive was taken ill. She had to give up her work. After a few weeks she became paralyzed. I had to leave her during the day, but we made it up in the evenings.... I’ve met brothers and sisters who don’t seem to care for each other. They must be poor. We were rich. Of course it hurts more after if you care, but it’s worth it.... I wish you had known her—she was lovely....”

The gulls were crying above the wave-dashed rocks. Clare seemed to be listening.

“Then she was taken. I tried to go on—but I didn’t make a big success of it.... A few months after, I had an accident. I



had to go to the Museum in a hurry so I went in the historian's car. There was a smash up, and my arm got hurt. The consequences were quite out of proportion to the cause. I suppose I was rather tired to begin with."

"Of course you got compensation?" Martyn's voice was so fierce that Clare suddenly smiled. It was wonderful to have someone angry for her sake.

"Yes," she said brightly. "I got rid of the rich man!"

"He paid everything of course?"

"But of course he didn't! I didn't want him to."

"We'll see about that!"—and Clare smiled again.

"Oh no, I'm better off than he is."

"You are right there. But—the cad!" Then his voice softened—"Let me see your arm," he said.

Clare turned back the sleeve and held her arm out towards him. A long scar disfigured it on the inside between the wrist and the elbow.

"It's very ugly," she remarked; "but the doctors were so proud of it—and themselves."

Martyn took her right hand in his, and passed his fingers lightly over the disfiguring scar. Clare felt her pulses beat faster, but she did not draw her hand away.

"You've had a rough time, little one!"

He turned down the sleeve, and fastened the cuff for her with a smile. Then he looked away across the sea, still keeping his hand on hers. He knew there was another man. He wanted to hear about him; but he looked away from her—compelling himself not to will her to tell him.

"Do you want to know the rest?" she asked at length.

She had decided. He turned—satisfied.

“My sister wasn’t like me,” she went on—explaining. “She was pretty, and I think she was easier to—love. There was a man.... He was ... handsome—”

“Of course!” growled Martyn, under his breath.

“And ... good.... We both liked him very much, but he fell in love with Olive.... That was natural....”

Martyn said nothing. Clare suddenly twisted her hand palm upwards, and closed her fingers round his. She was making her confession.

“I cared,” she said—a little catch in her voice; “but Olive was so much to me. And of course, if a woman cares for a man, she can’t get in his way. It was a stiff fight but ... there was nothing that the whole world might not have known.... He was good to Olive. She had been so strong until that sudden illness; after that she was an invalid. We thought that she might be with us for many years, but we knew that she wouldn’t walk again. Yet he never failed. I loved him for that. I never thought that he would misunderstand.”

She looked at Martyn with sudden appeal. “How could he have misunderstood?” she said huskily.

Martyn’s grip on her hand tightened.

“She left me.... I had given without counting the cost. He thought I was—cheap, so he went too. His thought hurt more than his going. He thought.... I was trying to win him.... He despised me for that.”

“The brute!” said Royce wrathfully.

A sudden smile transfigured Clare’s wistful eyes. “No, not a brute. He just didn’t understand. Men don’t, you know.”

“There was no excuse for not understanding. He deserves horsewhipping!”

“If I ever let you know his name I shall never forgive myself. He was very good to Olive.”

Martyn had intended to forget the woman who for a little while had charmed him, but as he looked at the girl beside him—slight and fragile in her black and white muslin, with eyes made for laughter but still bearing the aftermath of tears—he thought of Iva Charteris—beautiful and strong—living in the sunshine, and he knew that Iva would never have made such a confession. She might have told of men who had loved her; she would never have told that she had loved unasked.

He captured Clare’s book of verses, put it in his pocket, and got up from the rock.

“It’s time you were having some lunch,” he observed practically.

He held out his hands; she put hers into them, and he drew her up.

“Yet you are glad you are alive,” he reminded her.

She faced his searching look for a moment; then she freed her hands and stooped and plucked a delicate spray of the sea-lavender that grew among the boulders.

“Yes,” she admitted, “I am—now.”

“And so am I,” he said.

## CHAPTER VII

### *MARTYN TRIES TO BE HONEST*

WHATEVER Martyn Royce did, he did thoroughly, and in the days that followed, he put the whole force of his will into the wooing of Clare, as years before he had put it into the winning of success—when he had determined to reach his harbor even though through a sea of rejection slips, and find the plenteous land beyond. Now, though the goal seemed far easier of attainment, he had less self-confidence.

Once Martyn had won Iva Charteris—the beautiful woman whom others had courted. If Wilfred had never opened his eyes; if, later, he had found himself with a wife whom he could not love; he would have abided by his mistake, and never moved a finger to get the things that he had missed. But now he owed Iva nothing. He would use the experience the courtship had given him—weaving it into his work—and forget the woman.

But right into his bitter lonely thoughts—his feverish, saving work—Clare had slipped so quietly. He had not recognized her presence until she was established and at home. Now, old queer dreams of happiness came back to him, bringing hunger for treasures beyond his waking knowledge.

Martyn knew the power that Nature puts into the hands of a man, to win the woman of his desire. He kept the power under control that the spirit of his dreams—to him so infinitely higher than Nature—might become a wonderful reality. That Sunday by the sea, he might have won Clare had

he chosen. Clare did not know that, but Martyn did. But he knew that if the woman only in Clare responded to the call of the man in him, he might find one day that the soul which had lured him had eluded him. Because he wanted such a great thing he would not snatch at the lesser; and before the splendor of the great thing he could not be self-confident.

Those were wonderful days to Clare. Her explorations in the realm of a new personality discovered for her some things that startled but many more that interested her. She accepted Martyn's companionship without self-questioning. She never made a simple situation complex by uncomfortable analysis.

One day they found a sheltered nook at the top of a wooded hill. The trees hid the houses below. The branches overhead formed a cool green shade, shielding them from the heat of the sun, while letting in glimpses of the sky. Beyond—framed by the trees that grew on the hillside—lay the Bay, its waters deeply blue, its distant banks rising in high hills, against which nestled the old-fashioned town.

Clare was sitting on the grassy slope, leaning against the fallen trunk of a tree. Martyn was stretched on the ground beside her, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes on the fresh green above him which dappled the blue beyond. If sentiment was troubling him he hid it very well. His talk was of mundane realities.

“Any man with brains can get rich easily, if that's what he's out for,” he was saying. “But if it's something more than money he wants, he must fight for it—sometimes for years.”

Clare was wondering when he would tell her about himself. It never occurred to her to start any man on the road of self-revelation, though she was quite capable of leading him dangerously on once he was there.

“I had the chance of making a good income when I was twenty,” he explained, unexpectedly answering her thought, “but I wanted to be free to work out my own life, so I let the income go. It didn’t pay at first. It does now.”

He turned and looked up with a smile.

“You’re not inquisitive,” he remarked.

“You don’t say—‘You’re not interested,’ ” she challenged.

“No. I know.”

“You know too much,” she protested.

“Well?” he demanded.

“Well”—she echoed. Then she gave in with a smile. “What did you do instead of making a good income?”

“Sure you’re interested?” he asked with a laugh.

“You know,” she reminded him.

He turned away again. “I scribbled,” he announced casually—to the overarching leaves.

Clare’s eyes lit up.

“What did you scribble?”

“Oh, generally articles in those days. Bits of life. Sometimes scientific things. Character sketches. Anything to get my hand in. I’ve always been interested in every sort of problem. I like to tackle the things that set people wondering. The biggest job for years was to find my real market. You’d never guess what paid for my lodgings while I was searching for it.”

“Fashion articles?” she suggested gaily.

“Slogans,” he said with a laugh. “Catchy phrases about somebody’s biscuits or beef. I was great at them. I expect my

influence has often been round you on your marketing days and you have never known.”

“What a weight of responsibility for you! And now?” she demanded eagerly.

For a big moment Martyn was silent—to enjoy that eagerness. Then he said, still casually, as if it were not there:

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“I still scribble; but I don’t have to go after editors and publishers now—they come after me. That’s the difference: that and the income.”

“Can any man reach that stage who doesn’t accept handicaps at the start?”

“Who doesn’t rough it, you mean?”

“Who isn’t willing to be poor.”

“Just the few can, perhaps. But you must live if you want to write of life. Have you ever been really hungry? I mean with the sort of hunger that makes you understand why people steal.”

“Only once,” Clare admitted, “and I am afraid that was due to folly. Still it was real.”

“Well—what did you think of it?”

“It was an experience.”

“Good! Never regret your experiences.”

“I never do.”

“There’s an awful lot of rubbish talked about starving,” declared Martyn, who had only faced it for himself alone. “I’ve been starving—but I’ve known many things that hurt far more. Starving isn’t the worst part of being poor.”

“No, I know,” agreed Clare, “unless there are children. One can call it fasting—and then it doesn’t hurt.”

“But—shirts!” supplemented Martyn, feelingly.

“Poverty is hateful!” Clare’s face was flushed. She was seeing terrible, crowded rooms where simple decency was impossible; where beauty was unknown.... But the sun was shining, and the earth was glad. “I should like to read something of yours,” she added impetuously.

He tried to keep delight out of his voice.

“Yes, I think you would. But you must wait,” he said provocatively.

“Why, sir?”

“Why? Don’t you know that waiting is good for us all?”

“You don’t,” she retorted with decision.

“No, I don’t,” he agreed. “I only think that the parsons think that I ought to think it, and I thought you would agree. You know, you are only pretending that you are comfortable, and pretending is a sin. Let me just put that woolly thing behind you.”

He got up and folded her sports coat that had been lying on the ground and put it comfortably at her back. “Try that.”

She leaned back obediently, and looked up at him. He did not know what his eyes betrayed. He was caught unawares when he saw their faint reflection in her own. Abruptly he turned and moved away.

He paced the narrow grassy slope between the trees—stooped to pick up something that had no value—threw it energetically away—came back—but not so close. Nature was too terrifically strong to play with. He took out a



cigarette, lit it and stood leaning against a branch of a tree. He was not going to make love—yet.

Clare was studying the veining of a leaf. Some new influence vibrating all around her was making her throbbingly alive in every nerve. She had thought and feeling for the man who was asking of her, and thought and feeling overflowing to the wonder of a leaf.

“You are a kid,” Martyn said suddenly, and she looked up to meet his smiling eyes.

“Why—what’s the matter with me?”

“I didn’t say that anything was the matter. Only you think you know so much of life, and you don’t know anything—of the most important things of all.”

“But I do,” she declared, hearing his thought more clearly than his words, and wanting to take her place beside him.

“You don’t really know what temptation is,” he persisted.

“You mean—” She hesitated, for words; for no one had ever talked to her as frankly as Martyn talked. Conversation with him made vocal words that had been known only to sight. Then she added honestly:—“There’s a big potential sinner in most of us.”

“You’re very fortunate if it’s only potential,” he said grimly. “You don’t really know what hand-to-hand fighting with the devil means. Some men can’t help going wrong.”

“I can’t believe that,” she protested. Her faith was of a Power that was infinite. It had never failed her yet, and she had drawn on It greatly.

“For some,” he asserted, thinking that she had not looked beyond her woman’s world, “it’s almost impossible to keep straight. I’ve known men go down at the first call of the

sirens. I think I understood it. I haven't done the same, but that's no credit to me. I'm sinner enough anyway; but I always hated coarseness—and when you hate a thing it hasn't much power over you. But I've done other things....”

He was speaking in matter-of-fact tones. He was trying to be honest. He imagined that he wanted Clare to understand him. Yet he never told her that he was hard and self-righteous and unforgiving and lonely and obstinate and self-sacrificingly kind. Perhaps he did not know. Neither did he know that Clare's illumination would never come down the track of his words. When his lips had said “scoundrel” his eyes had said “friend.”

Clare was looking at the hand resting on the branch; it was patched with shadow edged with light. What a strong living hand it was!

“To me, sins of the mind are worse than sins of the body,” he went on. “If I abuse my mental powers and use them for wrong ends, I'm worse than the adulterer. The one form of vice doesn't tempt me! the other is alluring—and infamous.”

Clare turned her eyes to the blue waters beyond. She felt that she was about to launch out into the great untried deep—and not alone. This man standing before her, talking to her gravely of things that had never entered her life—the man who had helped her, but had not made love to her—wanted her, needed her, and presently would tell her so.

Quite suddenly Clare knew, with deep conviction, that Martyn Royce needed her as much as—even more than—she had needed him. She felt the unconscious appeal that lay behind his blundering half-confession. For the first time she was in the presence of a great need that she felt she had the longing and the power to satisfy.

But she must not stop to realize—now. She must go on talking. Something wonderful was happening, but she must ignore it until Martyn himself should tell her: tell her the great secret that was already her own.

“Why don’t men and women have greater faith in their ideals?” she suggested; and her voice had a queer little shake as if it were not quite at home.

“You mean—why don’t they marry for love only?” he paraphrased quickly.

She nodded, looking down at the silver light that lay on the sun-kissed leaves.

“They think that they love. Nature gets them there! But passion is only one little part of love—the lowest. When they have outlived that, what have they left? I know a couple who’ve been putting up with each other for years; not loving, not hating—just indifferent. They go on living together because they’ve always lived together. If one died it wouldn’t matter vitally to the other. The world doesn’t call their lives a failure, yet I can imagine no more pitiable Dead Sea fruit than theirs.”

“As we see it,” amended Clare.

“We see it as it is!”

“But I’ve come across quite enough married love to keep pessimism at bay.”

“Why, of course. So have I. It’s one of the finest sights on earth! When love comes, everything is possible.” ... But Nature was growing too dangerous in that beautiful, quiet wood. He tossed away the end of his cigarette. “Now we’ll go for a sail,” he said.

Daring—he held out his hands and drew her up. “You haven’t seen the heavens open yet!”

Her eyes questioned him shyly.

“That’s true,” he asserted, “and I’ve not forgotten... You will when you love.”

With a sudden movement he drew her close; then, as suddenly, he dropped her hands.

In that moment Clare realized the strength of his self-control, and, wonderingly, she was conscious of the passion of his love.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *EDEN*

“YOU’RE not very sure-footed,” criticized Martyn, as he caught Clare’s hand and prevented her fall into a pool between the rocks.

“I know, but I’m always so thankful that the rocks are reliable,” she said laughing, as she regained her balance.

“You need a sure foot as well as a firm rock,” he expostulated. “That is—unless you’re going to have someone always by to hold you up.”

Clare laughed happily again as she looked at him. He seemed that afternoon like an irresponsible schoolboy on a holiday, and his gaiety was infectious.

“Let’s go and live right down under the sea,” he suggested persuasively, “where no one would intrude. There’s a lovely little world down there; waving forests of seaweed, beautiful green lawns that you’d love to walk on, and sunlight—sunlight shining on a palace—miles down! Shall we go?”

“Oh, I know that fairy palace—built by millions of tiny creatures in thousands of years! It must be beautiful. I’d love to explore. Did they give it an old-world garden?”

“Let’s go and find out.”

“But I’ve only human eyes.”

“I’ll take my microscope.”

“What fun! But if the news leaked out, other people would be sure to follow us.”

“But we could hide—like the fish. That’d be one of the delights of that wonder-world. Don’t you know that a trout

makes himself dusky when he lies in a shady pool, and when he passes on to the sunny waters he shines again?"

"I'm afraid you want to keep your discoveries to yourself."

"To ourselves. Shall we go?"

"Oh, yes—if we come back in time for tea."

"Now you've spoiled it all, you prosaic woman."

Clare sat down on a rock, trying to hide that she felt dangerously poetic. "Let's investigate from above first," she suggested. "Look at this lovely pool—do look!" He leaned down beside her. "Have you ever seen such beautiful shades of seaweed—purples and greens and browns!" She lifted the trailing weeds with her fingers. "And I never knew there were so many kinds of shell fish. Look! And beautiful wee pebbles."

"That pool makes a lovely little world for fish and flower! Look at that miniature crab making his way between the bright green. I expect he thinks himself a man-of-the-world."

"Just see how his shell glistens when the light catches it!" she responded vividly. "He's a gay beau."

"Those tiny creatures are having a jolly good time in the sunshine." He looked down at her. "And so are we!" he added.

She drew a piece of the brilliant seaweed through her fingers. "So are we," she agreed.

"O rich woman! Do you know your wealth?" demanded Martyn; hiding his splendid joy behind a voice of laughing raillery. "The sun is shining—for you. The wavelets are leaving soft kisses on the rocks—for you. Those hills are tossing a hundred sweet scents—to you. Do you know?"

Clare turned a flushed face away.

“These shining pools are singing that the world is very good,” she said, with a little tremulous laugh. “But—please—I’m not greedy. You may have a share.”

“To imitate you and be prosaic,” Martyn said a little later, “I’ll go along to a cottage that I know, and see if the woman there will get a good tea for us. Stay somewhere around till I come back.... But—don’t bother!—Wherever you are, I shall find you.”

He went, and Clare was left on the golden shore alone. In her eyes was the light of happiness; in her heart a great peace. The future had been robbed of its dread—the past of its power. The present was joy. An endless Hallelujah!

Grass-crowned, rocky cliffs shut in the narrow sandy cove on the landward side; but just in the centre, the line of the cliff was broken, and the broad white road beyond curved outward, making a path to the edge of the shore. As Clare sauntered along in the sunshine, pausing to enjoy rock and shell and sea-weed on her way, the stillness was broken by the sound of a motor horn. The girl looked towards the road with interest.

The car stopped and she watched the people get out. First an elderly gentleman, with kindly face and remote, scholarly air which attracted her. He turned and held out his hand to the handsome well-dressed lady who followed him. The plain, bright-faced girl who was evidently her daughter was too interested in the boy who was with her to want any chivalrous attention for herself. The lady turned and gave directions to the chauffeur. Clare decided that she was the owner of the car and that the gentleman was her guest; then she forgot them both as her eyes fell upon the child whom the girl was watching solicitously.

Clare never forgot that first sight of Jim Cavendish, for, all unheralded, he took her heart by storm.

She watched him come towards her along the golden sandy shore; just a boyish boy, in a red jersey and short serge knickerbockers, but beneath the boyishness Clare saw deeps. The clear blue eyes looked out from a beautiful face that was all too pale; the short thick hair that waved over the lovely head was tumbled gold in the sunshine.

His companion offered him her arm. He refused it promptly, with boyish independence, but Clare noticed that he limped. She read pain in his face, but his lips smiled. She heard his gay voice—without catching the words. They appeared to be a joke, for his companion echoed his laugh. Clare smiled in sympathy, but her eyes were moist.

She sat down under the shadow of a rock. The gentleman, the girl and the child went nearer the sea. The chauffeur came from the car with a tea basket, spread a dainty white cloth on the sand by the cliff, and lit the spirit lamp beneath the silver kettle.

“Picnicking in luxury!” said Clare to herself amusedly. “That isn’t the real game.”

The bright-faced girl had a book with her. She laid it on the sand while she dug out a seat for the boy with her hands. He saw what she was doing and promptly started digging, too. The gentleman picked up the book. He turned over the pages—his face lit with interest.

“You have the real thing here,” he remarked, after a few moments, looking up at the girl, who had completed her arrangements.

“It’s a remarkable book,” she agreed, with less enthusiasm, —“Jim, darling, don’t be so independent, that seat’s for you.



I'm going to make another for myself. But rather too realistic—don't you think? If he'd only be a little more tolerant—a little less scathing and satirical—”

The man's eyes returned to the book. “It's undiluted genius,” he pronounced with sure emphasis.

Clare heard. She looked across the sun-flecked sea, and her eyes held laughter. Undiluted genius! What remained for Shakespeare?

The lady, who had been talking to the chauffeur, joined her daughter and her guests.

“Personally I don't like the man,” she volunteered, “and I don't care for his writings. He's wonderful in a way, of course. I know many women who absolutely rave over him. You are one of his admirers, Lord Alwyn?”

“He has a marvellous personality.”

“So had Mephistopheles! I always mix the two in my mind.”

“Oh come now!” exclaimed Lord Alwyn; “there isn't much softness about him, I admit, but he's as straight as they make them.”

Clare suddenly caught sight of Jim's blue eyes. They were flashing indignation.

“He's the most wonderful man in the world!” he cried, a rosy color flushing his cheeks, “and the best!”

The lady laughed. “I'm so sorry, Jim dear. I forgot our hero-worshipper. Of course he is a genius.”

“A genius!” the boy echoed. “But it isn't that,” he protested. “Don't you know there are men who would die for him!”

“He’s fortunate in having such a champion,” she responded smiling.

As Clare’s thoughts echoed her verdict, she saw Lord Alwyn put down the book with a sudden expression of surprise.

“Why—here’s the man himself!” he exclaimed; and Clare turned—to see Martyn coming down the shore, his hat in his hand.

She saw him shake hands with the two ladies and the gentleman who so appreciated him; she saw the worshipping admiration in Jim’s wonderful blue eyes—then she slipped away under cover of the rocks, so that none should see her wounds.

Undiluted genius.... A wonderful personality.... Women rave over him....

For radiant days Martyn Royce had belonged to her alone. She had imagined him lonely, and had given herself generously; but away in a world that she did not know, men and women were proud to call him friend. How blind she had been! The world knew a genius, while she had seen only—a man. She had never thought of his personality, and strangers could call it “marvellous”.... Women rave over him! and Clare had thought that the revelation of his charm was for her alone. Blind—blind!

She walked on alone among the rocks—but the splendor had faded.

Clare had loved before. She was far too liberal to live unloving. But the quality of a woman’s love depends upon the personality of the man who inspires it. Clare knew now that she had never loved with every faculty—of mind, body, and soul—as she loved this man; and the knowledge made

her afraid. Truly, tyrannical love can afford to laugh the while he is ignored, for he knows surely that his turn will come.

Martyn would find her soon. She must turn from the light that Nature was flashing over a strange, unexplored region she had never suspected hidden within herself. Later—when night came kindly, and the heavens were lit with stars—she would be alone; then perhaps she would look at the love that was beautiful and terrible—a love of the depths and the heights. Now she must ignore it. And she must forget that she had been so blind.

At last Martyn found her. He was looking very happy.

“Your imagination spoke truly,” he cried gaily. “Others have discovered our Paradise.”

“I saw them; and saw that you knew them,” she confessed.

“You’d never have suspected that I wished them at the Antipodes, would you? I can be a first-rate hypocrite on occasion.”

“I’m sure they didn’t suspect it,” she admitted, resolutely forgetting that the world claimed the man she loved.

“I’m a pretty good actor when I like. But I’m awfully sorry I had to keep you waiting. They wanted me to join their precious picnic. I had to make up no end of a yarn.”

“But why make up?”

He laughed. “Why bother to explain? I’ve told them of unknown beauties ahead which they will go and seek, while we’re left in peace. Now for tea! Are you ready?”

“We shan’t run into them?”

He looked at her—his eyes dancing. “Trust me!” he said; and she remembered—“women rave over him.”

“Did you notice them?” he asked, as they sat under the mulberry tree, in the cottage garden on the cliff.

Clare began to pour out tea.

“Yes,” she said, trying to speak naturally. “I was watching them before you came. Then I fled.”

“That’s rather a fine man,” he explained, passing the bread and butter. “I don’t know what he’s done that they should have made him a lord, but fortunately it doesn’t seem to have upset him. He still quietly enjoys spending his wealth for his fellows—according to his lights. But he manages to keep plenty of leisure for enjoying his rare collection of pictures, and reading the books he really loves—which shows him to be uncommonly wise.”

Clare put strawberry jam on a corner of her bread and butter.

“Tell me about that delicate-looking child,” she asked. “I’ve never seen such a lovely boy-face before. Is he lame?”

Martyn’s eyes grew grave.

“Not always,” he said. “He has a fiendish disease that no doctor can understand or cure.”

“He looks as if he suffered, but he looks so happy too.”

“He’s the happiest and pluckiest little fellow I’ve ever met. He’s one of the very few people in the world I care for.”

“He cares for you,” said Clare—remembering Jim’s eyes.

Martyn smiled; and a phrase stabbed Clare’s memory:—“A marvellous personality.”

“So you found that out!” he said. “I’ve never heard him speak evil of anyone. He has a quaint genius for finding the good.”

“That is genius worth having.”

“Yes; it’s rare. I know one other who has it.” He looked at Clare. Clare was looking across the sea.

“Of course, Jim won’t be here many years,” he went on. “I suppose that’s why he’s getting so much into his life. I always think that fine description, attributed to the wise king of old, applies to him,—‘He being made perfect in a short time fulfilled a long time.’ ”

Then he smiled again.

“He’s not in such a hurry as you were to be off; but I think he has your feeling that heaven and earth are hardly as far away from each other as the drops of the ocean. He talks about the one as matter-of-factly as the other. He informed me one day—‘I suppose Heaven must be fine, but I’m not in a hurry to see it, because it’s so jolly here!’ He’s got plenty of commonsense, and no cheap sentimentality. Once he confessed—‘I do love this earth although it’s my enemy!’ When I asked—why his enemy? he reminded me—‘The world, the flesh, and the devil, you know.’ Then we had a bit of a talk, and the enemy was transformed into a friend—no less loved.”

Undiluted genius!... Clare wished that she could have heard that talk.

“Tell me more about him,” she asked, moving the plate of home-made cakes out of the way of his arm.

“There’s so much—I couldn’t tell you a fraction. You must meet him one day.” Then he laughed delightedly. “I’d like him to tell me about it afterwards!”

“Why—is he very observant?”

“Yes—very. But only communicative about his observations when they are favorable. He’d like you. You

have so much in common. You both have the faculty of making one feel that the spiritual is man's natural atmosphere."

Clare flushed, but Martyn was voicing his thoughts in all simplicity.

"I can just imagine him telling me exactly what your mouth is like, and where your special charm lies," he added appreciatively. "I shouldn't dare to confess that I hadn't noticed. He thinks too highly of my judgment."

"What would he talk to me about?" Clare asked.

"I can't tell at all what he'll be most interested in, a week—a month—ahead. It may be cricket—or football—or the organ—or aeroplanes; It may be calvinism—or dreadnoughts—or verbal inspiration. Perhaps it'll be motor cars—or the Irish question—or the infallibility of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Those and a hundred-and-one other subjects have their turn. He grows enthusiastic about them all."

"I wonder what he'll become," she said, thoughtfully.

"A musician, perhaps—but not in this life," he responded.

Clare was following the dancing shadows on the cloth with her fingers. "That was not his mother or sister?" she asked.

"Oh, no, Jim's just spending a week with them. He lost his parents some years ago. He was quite an afterthought of theirs. In this case second—or third—thoughts were certainly the best. I'm not sure whether it was kind to Jim to bring him into the world, but it was certainly kind to the world. His eldest brother inherited the beautiful old place that has belonged to the family for generations. Jim lived on in the old house with him and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Gerald didn't get on very well. They would have been happy enough if only

they could have thought so, but she began to make a fool of herself about another man.”

“Were there any children?”

“No. But motherhood wouldn’t have altered her character. Anyway her fooling was stopped. I think she really cared for her husband. They were crossing the Atlantic some months ago, on their way home from a long holiday. The liner was wrecked. They went down together.”

“Perhaps they found each other then.”

His eyes met hers. “I knew that you’d want to think that.... Perhaps you’re right.”

“And Jim?” she asked. “Is he the only one left?”

“He has a brother,” Martyn said shortly—throwing cake to the birds. Then he added more communicatively:—

“There’s a very good family nurse who married the butler. She’s hospital trained, and a fine woman. Of course she adores Jim.”

“Everyone must love him. Is his brother like him?”

There was a moment’s pause, then Martyn said curtly,—

“Not at all! Jim has strength of character for the two of them.”

Clare caught his changed expression. What comparison had that lady used?... She stopped her thoughts.

He smiled again as he met her eyes, and the softness came back to his own.

“If you’ve finished, we’ll give the birds free access. Let’s go across the common you love; the common that leads right to the heart of the setting sun.”

They went together through the gold of the ripened cornfield, where the poppies were sleeping—through the radiance of the gorse and the heather, towards the glory of the western sun.

Twilight fell. Together they watched the first stars come out—clear and beautiful—in a cloudless sky. Clare told herself that she would forget her fears—until the night came, and she would be alone. For a little while longer yet the man she loved was beside her, and the world was theirs.

Suddenly—as on that day when she had watched his boat come home—she felt his hand against hers; her fingers were captured in a strong clasp. She looked up at him—and everything else was forgotten.

“What has been the matter?” he asked gently.

Again he was surprising her.

“What do you mean?” she questioned.

“You’re doubting me,” he suggested gravely.

“No!” she said with sudden vehemence. “No! I couldn’t.”

“Then—” he persisted.

“Only—I thought I knew you. Those people—your friends—showed me that I didn’t.”

He faced her, imprisoning her hands in his.

“It is only you who do know me,” he said, and his eyes held a wonderful light. “It’s only you I want to know me.” Still above his passion ruled his hard-won self-control. “I’ve tried to be honest, little one. You know I’m not a saint.... I’ve done things I’ve despised. I’ve lied. I’ve been a brute. But....”

He raised her hands to his shoulders as he drew her closer, and she felt the hard beating of his heart.



“I love you,”—and passion thrilled in his voice. “I love you—Clare. This one bit of me is wholly clean—I love you.”

Did Adam whisper those words to Eve as they walked together beneath the splendid stars? Did the shepherd breathe them to the Shulamite as they went home across the hills together? Perhaps the great confession is nearly as old as man, but the ages have not robbed it of its power to make a new heaven and a new earth for every man and woman who loves. It may be that its power will outlive the last daybreak—when the shadows flee away.

Martyn’s hands on Clare’s were strong and virile. She felt his power. He had won what he had waited for. In her soul there burned the pure white flame that answered to his own. His eyes tried to read hers, for as yet he did not know.

“I love you with all the best that is in me, Clare.” His voice was broken by his deep, controlled emotion. “All that I am is yours.... Beloved.”

Still he waited for her response. Even through the passion of his desire he must guard her freedom. He could hardly see her eyes in the twilight, but he felt the thrill in the hands beneath his own. Then she spoke, and at last for him the heavens were opened.

“Mine”—she breathed wonderingly.... “And I am yours. Didn’t you know, dear man?”.... His fingers tightened on hers. “I love you—love you.... Didn’t you know! I am yours—altogether—for ever.”

The beauty of the soul Clare saw that night was the lover’s clear vision of the Real.

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE WORK-A-DAY WORLD*

FOR a week Clare and Martyn roamed in Eden and dreamed their dreams together. Then Martyn talked of a wedding and Clare remembered clothes.

In Mrs. Hulbert's cosy kitchen, by the light of the paraffin lamp, she attempted to make up her accounts. It was slow business, for "I love you" kept intruding into the columns; "Beloved" made arithmetic go wrong. The final result of the interrupted calculations needed a daring optimism to face. Clare had no lack; yet she had determined to come to the man she loved as beautiful as possible.

She had dreamed her girlish dreams—of a lover who might one day be hers. For him she had secretly guarded her thoughts and her imagination. Now that he had come true there was nothing in the past that must be forgotten, nothing that she must ask him to forgive; but much more that she was discovering she herself must give.

While they roamed together in their Eden they talked of many things beyond themselves—and saw them all colored by their love. By way of Martyn's microscope Clare found hitherto unexplored wonder-worlds—in a tiny shell, a grain of sand, the section of a leaf, the chip of a common pebble. The lovers flamed responsive to the warm wonders of the earth—of life—of love, as they daringly explored the mysteries of those monosyllabic immensities together.

Then into Clare's dreams came new thoughts of personal things. For herself she had had very little vanity; now that Martyn loved her she must have much. She visioned the

ancient women of the East—their raiment of needlework, their clothing of wrought gold, their spices and perfumes; and she dreamed of fine garments, dainty embroidery, and exquisite needlework for herself. She would go to the man she loved as beautiful as she could make herself. She longed to begin.

She longed to finish too—that she might be his altogether.

Practical visionary! In her dreams—raiment of needlework, clothing of wrought gold, sweet perfumes, and dainty embroideries; in her exchequer—ten pounds. But she went on dreaming!...

At the end of the week Martyn had to go up to town. He said he would be back in a few days. The first evening that Clare found herself alone, she discovered that she too must go—to the cheap lodging that was waiting for her there—and earn some money. She could surely get some secretarial work—she was very experienced.

The morning after her return she set out to visit Employment Agencies with the hopeful optimism of the lover who has found that life is kind.

She was not to be too easily rebuffed, and the first check that she received was tempered by courtesy.

“I’m afraid it would be no use entering your name. Our last temporary post is just filled.”

“Are you likely to be having any more?” Clare asked diffidently.

“I’m afraid not. Most of our posts are in schools, and all the engagements for next term are fixed. I can give you another address if you like.”

“Thank you.”

Clare left the neat, business-like office, and the pleasant faced woman in charge, and in a few moments was in Oxford Street, the address in her hand. After a second journey underground she reached the Agency recommended—the possible adit to the temporary post that should make “raiment of needlework” a reality.

The building was over-flowed with people. Employers occupied but a small part—she saw fashionably-dressed ladies writing at small tables—those wishing to be employed seemed everywhere; and all Clare’s sympathies went out to that superfluous, seeking majority.

What post did she require? Secretary? Would she step upstairs—to the left.... On she went, passing men and women, up to a large room crowded with women—waiting.

Clare gave only one glance in the direction of that sombre, dreary group, but it roused her burning sympathy. How long had those tired women waited? How much longer would they have to wait? Would despair reach some of them before success had brightened their lives? Would old age—before love? She wished that they all knew how beautiful life could be!

She crossed the room to the small office in the corner. The stern-looking woman at the desk asked questions mechanically. But as Clare answered, she looked up, and her face changed. Suddenly she smiled. Clare did not know that she was radiating happiness, but the tired woman’s hard voice softened as she answered her appeal.

“I’m afraid we’ve nothing suitable. Couldn’t you advertise? That ought to bring you something.”

“Thank you,”—and Clare smiled in return, hiding her urgency. “I might try.”

“I’ll just put down the names of the best papers,” the woman suggested with unwonted consideration.

“Thank you very much,” Clare responded gratefully, as she took the slip of paper. Then she turned and walked quickly through that crowd of sombre waiting women—down into the street again.

The morning had gone and she had accomplished nothing. How much more fruitful had been the mornings in Eden! But still she kept her dream of the “clothing of wrought gold,” and of the king’s daughter within the palace, who made herself beautiful in the days of old.

She bought the papers in which she had been recommended to advertise, and got into the train southward bound. One advertisement looked encouraging. Should she spend the sunny afternoon still searching? The dream of sweet perfumes and dainty embroideries helped her to persevere. She decided to ring up the Agency of the encouraging advertisement.

A voice answered in cheery tones—

“Temporary post? Oh, yes—certainly!—Secretarial?... Shorthand?... Yes—sure to find you something.... One moment.... Do you speak French?... Ah, unfortunate. Had just the post for you. Still, come over and have a talk. We don’t close till five.”

The cheery voice stopped. Clare said that she would come at once—hung up the receiver, and again started west, lured on by those deceptively encouraging tones.

Clare hated travelling underground, but she chose her own mental abode, and there she kept the sunshine. Tired men and women smiled involuntarily as they looked at her glowing face—and went on their way a little less wearily.

Once again she emerged into Oxford Street, and after several inquiries found the place that she sought. Her hurry had been unnecessary. She was left unnoticed in a dingy waiting room, while the precious minutes passed, carrying away the beauty of the day that could never come back.

The air of the room was stifling. Clare transferred her consciousness to a golden shore. She watched a graceful vessel cutting a straight path through blue waters—the sunlight on her sails....

After nearly an hour someone came to the door and called a name. Clare rose, thinking that it must have been hers. But still she had to wait—as many others had waited before her.

Some time later a very unprepossessing woman came in, with a paper in her hand. Clare now dreaming of the “raiment of needlework,” was rudely awakened.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,”—and the tones—no longer cheery—scattered the dreams. “No, we’ve no temporary posts. Yes, there was a lady here when you rang up. Just the thing; but you see, you’ve not sufficient French.... Shall we have any others? I’m sure I can’t say. Here’s the registration form. Will you fill it in—the fee is half-a-guinea. Oh—you’d rather take it with you?... Good evening.”

Clare had had many bad minutes that day, but they were afterwards adequately paid for by the good ones spent in enjoying the recollection of them. But when she thought of the girls to whom such experiences were all too common—girls who had not her knowledge of a Paradise beyond—then laughter died, and she drew up plans for a fairer England.

## CHAPTER X

### *MORTON HILLIER*

IN prosperous childhood days, Clare and her sisters had been guarded by a devoted nurse. When “her children” were grown, Nurse Janet married, but her first family was never deposed from its place in her affections. Now her tiny home was Clare’s temporary harbor.

It was while she and Janet were at tea that same evening that Clare had an inspiration. She jumped up from the table excitedly.

“Janet—I’ve an idea! I must go out and phone at once. I shan’t be long.”

“But my dear, you’ve been running about all day. You’ll be tired out!”

“You don’t know my reserves! I want to go and talk to Mr. Hillier.”

“Mr. Hillier,” Janet echoed, following Clare into the narrow passage. “I always used to hope you’d marry him.”

“You old dear! So did lots of people—only not ourselves. That’s why we’re such friends now.... I’ll be back soon.”

She dashed out of the house and along the road to the post office. She found the telephone number and rang up excitedly.

“Has Mr. Hillier gone yet?... Then may I speak to him?... Miss Chalmers.”

A long pause.

“Hullo! Is that you Morton?... Oh, I thought it was Mr. Hillier. Isn’t he there?... Tell him I want him please.... Sure

it's you this time?... Say it again.... Yes, now I know your laugh. Well—you're a real faithful friend, aren't you? You don't want to go back on it?... Then I want your help.... Financial? Oh, no thanks—you don't need to bring anything along—though it's sweet of you. Can you come and see me at once?... Yes, at once! I'm lodging with Janet—you remember? We'll find a corner where no one will intrude.... Do I sound happy? Well, I am!... I've just come back from Paradise—a little place on the West coast.... You don't know it? You old duffer!... Come along at once—at once.... Good-bye.”

Clare had lost many precious things from her life—she had found many unvalued ones. She had walked lonely in the darkness with bereavement, treachery, sickness and pain. Friends whom she had trusted had failed her—others she might have trusted had asked more than she could give. But still there had remained a few elect—ever loyal. The woman who—though she lose a lover—can always boast a friend, can never be wholly poor.

When Morton Hillier came into the little parlor which Janet had hurriedly tried to beautify, Clare felt grateful for him—her best friend.

“You're a dear to come right away!” she said directly. “I wanted some help and I thought of you. After I'd phoned I remembered it might be no good at all—but anyway it's nice to see you!”

“You don't mind if I smoke? Thanks.... Now, what is it?”

Hillier lit his cigarette, and through the curtain of the smoke-cloud, studied her attentively.

When he had last seen her, her vitality had been very low. Now she was brimming over with life. The sharp lines of the



thin face had given place to soft curves; the thick hair which had lost its lustre was burnished once more, and held a few stray sunbeams imprisoned in its waves. The mouth which he had seen set in unacknowledged pain, was tender with smiles; the face which had been so pale was softly tanned by sun and sea; and, more than all, the eyes—which he remembered dark with suffering—were full of light and color and a wonderful joy. She rested her elbows on the head of the red plush sofa—her cheek on her clasped hands.

“I want work, I’ve been hunting for it all day—but it isn’t easy to get. I’m tired of telling my age, and what I can’t do, and where I’ve been. Suddenly I thought of you. Now Morton, you’re not to make work, mind; but do you remember you wanted a lot of stuff typed some time ago and I couldn’t do it? I wondered if you had any now. I may as well say at once—I’m an expert! And I’ve got my own machine.”

Hillier hesitated. He wanted to know what lay behind.

“I’m not sure,” he said slowly. “Anyway, I’m afraid I haven’t very much.” He smoked thoughtfully.... “But I expect I could get you some.”

“Could you really? At the ordinary rates, mind!”

He laughed. “How long do you propose to live on typing ‘at the ordinary rates,’ may I ask?”

“Well, I don’t exactly want to live on it. I should have to take some of it to live on, I’m afraid—unless I’m quick. But I want to—to—get some things that I want to work on while I’m living on the money that I have. I’ve no time to lose, or ...” she laughed light-heartedly and her laugh was music—“or there won’t be any left to live on,” she concluded, without fear.

“And afterwards?”

Hillier saw the color flood her cheeks and her bright eyes grow brighter. He had never thought her beautiful before.

“Afterwards,” she echoed with a catch in her voice.

“Afterwards—I shall be fixed up.”

He studied the end of his cigarette.

“You want some money in the meantime?”

“Yes—it’s absolutely essential. I must earn some.”

“I say, Clare—why not let me help? We’ve been friends long enough, and you know I’ve heaps. We’re all so foolish over money. Pretend we’re back in Apostolic times—when they had all things in common!”

“But I’m afraid I can’t make my riches common, so I mustn’t let you share yours with me! But I shan’t forget... Can you get me the work?”

“I should like to know what you’ve got to live on,” he suggested.

Clare blushed again.

“It’ll last a few weeks. It’s so cheap here. But I want to earn some more at once.”

“I had been thinking of asking you for something,” and he took out another cigarette.

“Ask anything!” she said rashly.

“Well—Pam’s keen on having a little place in Sussex—chiefly for the children. I’ve seen just the right thing, and I’m furnishing it. I’d been wondering whether you could let me have some of those things of yours that I always coveted. The grandfather clock, and that old chest....”

Clare jumped up suddenly—then sat down again on the rug.

“What a silly!” she exclaimed. “I forgot all about them!”

“I always knew you were practical,” Hillier observed appreciatively.

“So did I,” she agreed. “But do you really want them? Honestly?”

“Honestly. Where are they now?”

“Stored.”

“You’ll not be wanting them?”

She hesitated—but there were things that she wanted more.

“No,” she said decidedly. “But, Morton, if you really want to buy them, you must get someone else to price them. I won’t trust you.”

He smiled. “You’re horribly suspicious!”

“I was born that way. I won’t have cheating!”

“Anyway, the things I want—even without cheating—will bring you more than you could earn by typing ‘at ordinary rates’ in a good many weeks.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. Will you have something in advance?”

“Oh no.... When will you look at the things, Morton? You’re to be sure and not have them unless they are exactly what you want!”

“I promise that if my memory has deceived me I’ll have none of them.” He threw away the end of his cigarette. “Are you going to tell me his name?”

She looked at him blankly.

“But—” she began.

“Is it a secret?”

She held out her bare sunburnt hands.

“You see—” she hedged, smiling.

“Will it be diamonds?”

“No—one large pearl.” She blushed again. “Oh, Morton, how did you know?”

“If you want to keep it to yourself, you must hide those eyes of yours,” he said, looking at her keenly. “Even that won’t do it, unless you wear a veil!”

“Is it really as obvious as all that?” she asked softly.

“It is,” he said very quietly, for there seemed to him something wonderful about her radiance.

She looked up, and for a moment he wondered fiercely if any man were worthy of her.

“It is Martyn Royce,” she said, in a tone that was new to him. She clasped her hands round her knee as she sat on the rug.

For a moment Morton looked at her in astonishment.

“Martyn Royce!” he echoed. “The novelist? Surely not!”

Clare smiled happily. “But surely,” she said—“Why not?”

“You are engaged to him?” incredulously.

Clare nodded. “Say something, Morton,” she pleaded, as Hillier remained silent.

He roused himself. “You took my breath away. But of course I wish you everything good. You deserve it!” He continued to study her face. “Martyn Royce! And you’ve been looking for work!”

“Don’t you understand, Morton—I know I shan’t be able to get many things, but what I get must be beautiful.”

“You meant to stay on here until you married Mr. Royce?”

“Why not?”

“Why not! Does it harmonize?”

“It’s all harmony inside!”

“But it’s the outside that shows.”

“I don’t look at that!”

Morton pondered again.

“Look here, Clare, you’ll just have to come to us till you’re married! You’re no good at all at looking after yourself. Pam’ll love having you. So will the kiddies. They’re getting such jolly little youngsters.”

“You take my breath away now!”

“What does Mr. Royce think of your being here?”

“He doesn’t know. He thinks I’m still by the sea. I couldn’t tell him that I was going to look for work.”

“I should think not! Well, Pam’ll be along tomorrow to fetch you. But when he wants you we’ll just get out of the way.”

“How lovely you are!”

“I’ve been called many things, but never lovely before,” he said laughing.

“Do you know him?” she asked shyly.

“I met him some years ago, but not since he’s made his name. We’ve conducted one or two law cases for him, but I didn’t happen to meet him personally. One hears a good deal about him. He seems to be rather a wonderful man.”

“He is,” she agreed. “But—do you know, Morton—I was slow in finding that out.... Must you go? You have been good. Thank you a thousand times!”

Janet came along the passage as Morton opened the door. Clare took the redirected letter from her hand with a bright “Thank-you”; then her cheeks flushed.

“How dared they!” she exclaimed. Then, catching Morton’s eyes, she laughed. “I wish they hadn’t crossed out his writing,” she explained.

His hearty responsive laugh made Janet wonder what was happening.

“You’ve got it even worse than I thought! I think it’s quite time for me to be going.”

They gripped hands, and a moment later he was in the street.

“How brilliantly happy she looks,” he thought, as he strode along the lamp-lit pavements. “But I wish—I wish—it had been anyone else.”

But Clare had no wish left. She was curled up on the foot of her little bed, reading and re-reading her first love-letter; the prose-poem that was more eloquent than any of the books by which Martyn Royce had made his name—his first letter to the woman he loved.

## CHAPTER XI

### *THE PEARL*

MORTON HILLIER had not counted on his wife in vain. “Of course Clare must come here, Morton,” she said, as she embroidered a monogram with clever fingers. “I’ll go and fetch her tomorrow. Fancy thinking she could stay in a place like that when she’s engaged to Martyn Royce!”

He looked round their luxurious room. “It’s quaint, the things she doesn’t see,” he remarked, as he stretched himself comfortably in the big chair. “ ‘One large pearl,’ she said—just as if she was talking of sweet peas. I’d guarantee that the one large pearl could buy up everything she possesses!”

“How soon are they going to be married?”

“She didn’t say exactly. I should imagine Royce isn’t the kind of man to be slow about anything. I hope it’ll be all right.”

“Do you doubt it?” Pam asked, as she put down her work and rose to pour out coffee.

“I don’t doubt his straightness,” Morton said quickly. “But he’s a hard man—and a dangerous one, and Clare is painfully sensitive.”

“How dangerous?” Pam questioned curiously, handing him his cup.

“Well, perhaps that’s a bit too strong. But we’ve had a good deal to do with him, and he can be absolutely unscrupulous—when he thinks his end is just. He’s got an iron will. He’d sacrifice himself quite as willingly as he would another though.... Queer chap! Then he’s a bit of a

genius, and he goes in for moral and psychological problems that ordinary men leave alone. That needs a steady head. It's safer for a woman to marry a commonplace man—an ordinary everyday sort of chap.”

Pam laughed as she sat down for a moment on the arm of her husband's chair. “Yes, I think it's safer!” she agreed.

“You remember Wilfred Cavendish?” Morton asked her. “That boy who went out to the States to do farming, and get strong.”

“Yes. He had dreamy brown eyes.”

“I don't know anything about his eyes, but I met him the other day. He's quite changed. He looks as if he's going the pace. He used to worship Royce, now he hates him. I don't know the reason, but it must be something pretty rotten.”

“You must bring him along one day. He was a delightful boy.... Is Mr. Royce handsome?”

“Not a scrap! But he's very noticeable.”

“I can't picture him as a lover—from his books.”

Morton laughed. “That's about the last thing I could have done, if I hadn't seen Clare's face, but having seen that I fancy he must have been concentrating his genius on his wooing.”

“It'll be fun helping her to get ready! I shall fancy I'm getting married again myself.... I'll write and tell her I'll call for her in the morning.”

“You're a trump!” her husband declared, as she went to her desk.

So Clare was driven away from the overcrowded room in Janet's tiny hospitable house, to be befriended and advised and teased in luxurious surroundings, until she should be



ready to go to her own home—with the man who had shown her a new heaven and a new earth.

She had written to Martyn. When she was with him, shyness kept back the words that clamored to be uttered; but away from him—with that virile prose-poem his eloquent representative—she felt that she could write the unutterable. The clamorous words were set down red-hot, with the imprudence that is wisdom in the presence of the Best.

Clare's love had crystalized her dreams of beauty, and with Pam's help she found her "raiment of needlework" becoming a reality; her thoughts of choice materials—of clean-scented lavender and fragrant verbena, of the hundred dainty trifles that refine a woman's personal possessions—translated into facts.

In love Nature renews her world with sunshine. The delicate beauty of the apple-blossom—which breathes cleansing through the soil of a man's soul—is the glad out-giving of new life within the tree. Love brings hidden beauties to light. It takes to itself for its own enrichment from the prodigal world around.

Poverty, ugliness, lack, are incompatible with limitless life—in which love rules.

Clare had entered that larger life. A delicate fragrant beauty must manifest the unfolding life within....

The following evening she went alone into the garden, to begin her embroidering by the light of the setting sun.

The summer was nearly over. A few roses still lingered—forlornly despoiled of the grace of their early foliage. Dahlias—white, scarlet, yellow, rose—bloomed gaily, as yet untouched by frost. Virginian creeper flung around the open French window a transient crimson glory, and in the raised

bed beyond the lawn massed goldenrod, and chrysanthemums of bronze and gold and feathery white, caught the glow of the sunset light and kept calling Clare's eyes from her work.

Suddenly the work dropped from her fingers. The white and the crimson and the gold were forgotten. Martyn had come!...

"Why did you run away, little one?" he asked, after a few minutes—trying to control his throbbing pulses.

"You said you couldn't be back for a week!" she reminded him, passing her hand over his sleeve, as if to make sure he was an actual fact.

He laughed boyishly.

"Never take any notice of anything this man says! Suppose I had gone!"

"Would there have been a row?" she asked happily.

"There'd have been some swearing! But..." he looked at her curiously. "Did you imagine me dictating to you?"

"Before the 'obey'?" she suggested.

"You're wrong there," he said gravely. "No man has a right to make a slave of any woman—not even if he's a novelist. You will always be free."

"Free!" she echoed. "I'm afraid I've given my freedom away."

But freedom was the heart of Martyn's creed. He must be true to that—though his world should fall.

"I'm not very orthodox about marriage," he explained. "Of course, I've been thinking hard since I left you. To me it seems so much fairer to leave the woman free, than to bind her by the power of the law so that she is—in law—yours for ever. Would you rather come to me without the fetter of the

law? I should be bound right enough!” he added, a queer thrill in his voice.

His arm was round her shoulders. She put back her head so that she could see his face.

“You understand, Clare—we should plight our troth to each other. I am yours—always. But if you choose, you can remain free.”

She looked at him gravely, but there was no trouble in her eyes. She understood.

“I can’t do that, dear man,” she responded simply. “I must be loyal to my church, and to the trust of my friends.”

“You really feel like that?”

“Yes.... And you?”

“We’ll get a parson’s blessing then! It was for you to decide.... But, Clare—if ever, in the days ahead, you want to go, the door will always be open. You will be free.”

“I shall never want that,” the girl said steadily.

“Of course, little one, we never do want to go when the door is open!” he responded, caressing her shining hair.

“Only I wanted you to understand.”

She lifted her head. He withdrew his arm from her shoulders, took possession of her sun-browned hand, and silently sealed their troth with the ring she had chosen—the one large pearl, set in platinum.

Clare suddenly imprisoned his right hand and pressed it against her lips; then a rich color flushed her cheeks, as she put it back on her knee.

“I can give you so little!” she explained.

“You have given me more than you will ever know!... How soon will you marry me, Clare?”

“How soon do you want me?” she asked shyly.

He gave a short laugh. At the sound of that laugh—the laugh of a man who has seen the heavens open and cannot contain the joy and wonder of the vision—she knew that she had not lived in vain.

“How soon? This minute!”

She gently touched the gem with her forefinger.

“ ‘And the twelve gates were twelve pearls.’ They opened to the new Jerusalem.”

For a moment his cheek rested on her curly hair. “I’m glad you chose it.” He captured her hands.

“Our gate to Paradise!... How soon?”

Suddenly Clare remembered Jim’s shining blue eyes, and his thrilling voice as he cried—“Don’t you know there are men who would die for him!” and she felt that she understood.

All around them the summer glory was passing; beyond, the crimson leaves were already beginning to fall; on her hand the lustrous pearl—triumphant product of pain and strife—proclaimed that her freedom had gone forever; yet Clare saw only the promise of a more glorious tomorrow, for her freedom was surrendered to the tyranny of Love.

## CHAPTER XII

### *THE WORLD—OUTSIDE*

THEY were married.

In the church Clare loved—the church made sacred by mystic meetings of aspiring humanity with overshadowing divinity—they plighted their troth to each other, in the sacred sacrament of lovers whose souls have been fused by a unifying flame.

Just outside, the busy world was hurrying through its day under a cloudy sky. Vehicles hooted, rumbled and rattled along the broad highway. Workers went stolidly about their uninspired duties. Journalists passed, unconscious of the “news item” that would have paid them so well. Men and women bought and sold—hoped and feared—let go their dreams or battled to hold their faith; while in the still sanctuary apart Martyn and Clare were proclaiming the love that makes all things new.

In the quiet Church old words were revived. Oft-repeated vows were made afresh to unwonted music.

“Wilt thou ... faithfully keep thee to her alone as long as ye both shall live?”

Martyn said—“I will,” to the minister; and knew in his soul the certainty: *There is no death.*

“Wilt thou ... faithfully....”—and Clare in her turn said “I will,” while her heart added surely—“For ever.”

The sun, which had been hidden by clouds, suddenly broke through their restraining and came forth resplendent.

He poured his radiance through the beautiful window above—staining the cold purity of the lilies by Clare’s side with a passionate flood of a deep crimson of sacrifice.

But the light was golden as it rested on them both—as they took each other—“For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish.”

It shone undimmed as the Shadow feared of man threw his gauntlet to their joy, and “till death us do part” was uttered in defiance of his challenge.

The hope of Eternity takes the hurt out of Time, and love is the unconquerable antagonist.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *JIM*

**W**HILE Martyn was in the sunshine with the woman he loved, the lad who had loved him as his own soul was living in the darkness.

For years Wilfred had given to Martyn the worshipping homage of a boy—shy, delicate, and lovable—for a man older, stronger, wiser than himself; a man who, bearing scars gained on its battlefield, could yet inspire another with strong faith in the splendor of life. Wilfred's early world had been very narrow, but Martyn Royce had broken down the barriers and had shown him the world beyond. Far away on his small farm, Wilfred had worked hard and happily—the thought of Martyn his inspiration. He had come bringing the fruit of his work for Martyn's approval. He had always been ready to "fall in love" upon the slightest provocation, but no girl had ever suffered through his shy admiration, and Martyn had been more to him than any girl in the world.... Until Iva came!

Then, for an hour, Martyn was forgotten—for a mad night hour.... But the growth of a night had perished in the night, while the passion of the years remained the master-passion still.

Iva Charteris—like Wilfred—had feared before the anger in Martyn's eyes; but she did not know their power to drive to madness, for she had never seen their tenderness. She had shrunk from his scornful voice—cold and cruel; but it could not wound her as it wounded Wilfred, for she had never heard the music of its glad, wholehearted welcome. Martyn had

never truly loved Iva, neither would he ever deeply wound her—for the girl loved no one so well as she loved Iva Charteris.

But for Wilfred life had narrowed once more; hemmed in by the thought of his lost friendship—of the hate that had taken the place of love. Within himself that hate was breeding its like.

Wilfred had not Martyn's remedy for all ills—work. He left in the hands of his steward the work that he should have done, and worked at pleasure till pleasure became a work that brought no healing.

His brother watched him lovingly, but unobtrusively. Jim shared his big boyish thoughts without stinting, but the thoughts that hurt, he kept hidden. He had many talks with Painton and his wife, but the things which lay deep in his heart he never mentioned.

Mrs. Painton—elderly, capable and large—was for Jim a constant source of entertainment. His name for her was La Belle. The first time he used it she had looked into the glass at her plain, homely face. “You're just laughing at me, Master Jim,” she protested. Jim sprang up from the couch where he had been reading *Among the Stars*. He had one arm in a sling, but he put the other round her neck impulsively. His twinkling eyes met the reflection of her solemn ones above the mantel-piece.

“Laughing at you!” he echoed. “I'm not! You can't see how beautiful you are inside—you old dear!”

Then he gave her a boyish hug and returned to *The Stars*.

He was generally frank and communicative, but when La Belle attempted to discuss his brother she came up against impenetrable reserve.



They were in the garden one autumn afternoon when she first discovered the reserve. For the last year Jim—when well enough—had been attending a boy’s school four miles away. He had longed for the companionship of boys of his own age, but no public school would have admitted him, no master or matron would have taken the responsibility of keeping him under their roof; so he went to school by car each morning, and motored home again when the school day was over. But this was Saturday—and a holiday. He had only just recovered from a very bad arm, and sports were forbidden. As a matter of fact, they were always forbidden, but often indulged in. As Wilfred was away, Jim had decided that he and La Belle should plant crocuses in the grass beneath the trees. He wanted to have a gorgeous show next spring.

It had been a beautiful summer. Masses of hollyhocks, gaily defying the floral calendar, still bloomed in the herbaceous borders—careless that their season was past. The rose-garden—hidden from the busy planters—was rich with fragrant blooms, yellow and white and cream and red. In the open space beyond the trees birds were singing. The sun was warm over all.

Jim paused for a moment and rested his arms on the long handle of his dibber.

“I hope Wilfred’ll be home early,” he remarked. “I want him to tell me some more about fashions.”

La Belle precisely placed a bulb in the hole that she had made.

“Fashions!” she echoed, with her comfortable laugh. “What do you know about fashion, darling?”

“Not much—except I hate it. But I’ve got to write a composition on it,” explained Jim, putting his foot on the

crossbar and pressing it home. "Fashion's my enemy!" he added cheerfully, as he lifted the dibber with the round lump of earth imprisoned.

"That's the first enemy of yours I've ever heard of!"

He laughed. "Is it?" he said. "Has Painton told you about his? It must have been a lark when he got so disgusted with the devil that he threw a basket at him! Wasn't that something like Luther, or somebody? I wish I'd been there! I don't know much about the devil—yet," he added hopefully.

He put in a bulb, and returned the round lump of turf-covered mould to its place.

"What are draped skirts, La Belle?" he asked—stamping down the earth with his foot.

"Draped skirts! Why do you want to know about such things, dearie?"

"Bentley minor asked me which I liked better—draped skirts or tight skirts. I knew I hated tight ones so I said draped. What are they?"

La Belle discovered that a definition demands a dictionary.

"The sort that are—are—draped, you know," she said at last lucidly.

He looked at her merrily. "Oh, I see. I'm not awfully keen about them anyway. Nature and sport are my two favorite things.... But I like sport best!" he added honestly—sitting down on the ground and beginning to count the "Cloth of Gold" that remained.

"I wish Mr. Wilfred was home more," Mrs. Painton observed in an anxious voice. "I did hope he would settle down. This is such a lovely place."

Jim looked towards the old rambling house—two storied, many-roomed. He had been born there. From there he had made his discoveries of many wonderful worlds.

“I love it,” he said enthusiastically.

“Why don’t you try and persuade him, dearie?”

The sunlight flickered through the leaves and lit up the boy’s shining hair, and the eyes that were wise beyond his years.

“There are some things that won’t bear talking about,” he explained gravely.

Then he jumped up and whistled to his dog. “Here Fritz old man! Come along and have some sport!”

The shaggy black poodle came bounding up to him, and as the two ran off together, Jim’s laugh rang merrily across the garden....

It was only strangers who called that rarely beautiful face sad. Those who knew Jim, felt that they would never find his superior in happiness. The Angel who had offered him the chalice of suffering had given with it a rare and lovely courage. Jim did not ask for sympathy, but he shared his treasures.

One afternoon, several years before, Painton had gone into the nursery where Jim was lying alone in the twilight—after a week of illness. It was too dark to read and he was not strong enough to sit up at his beloved piano. As Painton opened the door he heard a ripple of laughter. He thought Mr. or Mrs. Cavendish must be there—but Jim was alone.

“What is it, Master Jim?” asked the old man—crossing to his side.

The child's eyes pierced the twilight, and he held out a hand invitingly.

"I was only having a laugh to amuse myself, 'cause I'd got nothing else to do," he explained. "Come and tell me some more about the devil!"

Jim always had greater interests than his own sufferings....

For a little while after he left La Belle, the boy and the dog romped happily. They finished by rolling over on the grass together—Jim, as usual, regardless of consequences. Then—his hand on the rough black head—he made his way to the road beyond the house, and up to the bridge over the stream across which he expected his brother to come. When he reached it, he climbed on to the low stone wall and sat on the top, swinging his legs. Fritz—black, dignified, and watchful—settled himself at Jim's feet.

Jim was feeling very anxious. Wilfred was in trouble, and he didn't know how to help him. He knew the cause of the unsteady step he sometimes heard at night; he understood why the hand grip was not always as firm as it used to be—why sometimes in the morning the eyes were heavy; the thing behind—which was stealing Wilfred's happiness—Jim did not know. He wondered, but he never asked. Some days Wilfred was quite sociable—almost like he used to be—and they had jolly talks together. On others, Jim could get no response to his overtures. Wilfred said he had neuralgia! The night before Jim had gone to bed at his usual hour, and, together with Mrs. Painton's benediction had received instructions to go to sleep at once. But as soon as she had departed, he jumped out of bed and opened the door wide, that he might not miss Wilfred when he came home. He meant to keep awake. Sleep weighted his eyelids, but he

would not yield. His bed was just beneath the open latticed window, and again and again he sat up—defying those rebellious lids, and compelling his ears to listen for the car on the broad country road.

At last he heard the sound of the horn in the distance—then the scrunching of gravel beneath the wheels. A little later Wilfred came upstairs. Jim heard his footsteps nearing the door.... In a moment they would pass.... Suddenly a slim, white figure stopped their progress.

“Good-night, Wilf!” Jim panted. “I was awake—and heard you. Good-night!”

“You ought to’ve been asleep hours ago, youngster!” and Jim recognized that his brother’s voice was not quite clear. “Here—get to bed. I’ll tuck you up.”

“Not that end, Wilf!” laughed Jim shakily. “Is your head better?”

“No—it’s damnable! Go to sleep. You old silly! Go—to—sleep,” and Wilfred went out unsteadily.

Now Jim sat on the wall thinking hard. The lithe, graceful body swayed slightly as the boy abstractedly rubbed one foot against Fritz’s rough, black head. One hand rested on the coping; the other was in Jim’s pocket, fingering the treasures there.

Suddenly his face changed. He jumped off the wall with a wild whoop of delight. Fritz started barking frantically. A smart dog-cart, drawn by a high-stepping thoroughbred, was coming along the road. At Jim’s shout the driver drew rein.

“Martyn!” gasped the boy happily—and then was silent.

He reached up his hand, and Martyn took it in his with a pleased smile.

“Well, Jim, old man—not at your sports to-day?”

“No. Such rot! I knocked my arm. But we’ve been putting bulbs in.”

He looked shyly at Martyn’s companion, and turned rosy red. He was always prepared to admire everything that belonged to Martyn, but now he fell into excess. He looked at the bright eyes that were meeting his expectantly—at the truant curls that strayed beneath the small hat—at the radiant face on which the sun and the breezes had lingered—and he was bewitched.

Martyn turned to Clare with a smile.

“I’ve told you about Jim,” he said. “Now, let me present him. Jim, this is Mrs. Royce—a great friend of mine, so you must be very fond of her!”

How could Clare make the acquaintance of Jim Cavendish from such a superior height? She slipped under the reins, rested her hand for a moment on Martyn’s, put her foot on the wheel, and sprang lightly to the ground. She took Jim’s slender hand in hers, and then she kissed him. Most people wanted to kiss Jim.

Martyn laughed at her impetuosity as he followed her. He gave kisses to no one but Clare.

“You knew, Jim?” he asked—as if it were a matter of moment that this child should share his happiness.

Jim was unobtrusively studying Clare’s happy face.

“I read everything I could find about it,” he declared. “It was such sport that the newspaper men didn’t get in till the finish! They wrote an awful lot of rubbish.”

“You think you could have done better?” Martyn asked, his hand on the thoroughbred’s neck, his eyes on the boy’s

sparkling face.

“I know better, anyway!” Jim said confidently. “I have wanted to see you,” he added—looking into Clare’s eyes.

“Well—what’s the result?” laughed Martyn.

Jim colored again and turned away.

“I’ll tell you when we’re alone,” he said. “Oh—you’ve got Kangaroo still! I wish I had some sugar. Down Fritz, old chap! Can you wait while I fetch some?”

“I’m afraid not. You’ll have to come and see us soon—then you can renew your friendship with Kangaroo.”

Jim stroked the horse’s nose affectionately. “May I really?” He looked at Clare. “And may I talk to you all alone?” he asked.

“Of course you may—but why?” Clare said, smiling.

“Because I want to know you.”

He turned to Martyn. “And did you go to Switzerland like the papers said?”

“Do the papers ever lie?”

“Yes”—emphatically. “They said you—”

“Well?” laughing.

Jim looked at Clare. “No!”—he protested.

“Oh, you needn’t be afraid! My little lady may as well know the worst of me as soon as possible.”

“But it was a lie!”

“This is amusing. What was it?”

He put his hand on the boy’s shoulder, and Clare watched the two with understanding.

“They said you were a wonderful writer, and all that, but....”

“Go on, Jim!”

“They said you were brutal. Idiots!”

Martyn laughed. “Well, I am! So you’re not going to believe the papers any more?”

“Not when I know things!”

“Wise lad! Well, we didn’t go to Switzerland. We had a grand time in Norway. Mrs. Royce will tell you all about it one day. Then we went down to the bungalow for a little while, and now we’re driving home.”

Jim looked at Clare shyly as she prepared to say good-bye. As he kissed her without self-consciousness he whispered—

“I’m so glad he’s got you. He was lonely—though that’s a secret. He’s just great!”

“When are you going to tell me?” Martyn asked smiling, as he shook hands.

Jim hesitated. “I don’t know—but ... she’s sweet!”

He waved his hand till they were out of sight, then he went back to his place on the wall....

Though Martyn was of the men who delight to break records, and speed up their lives beyond the pace of their times, yet his love for horses had kept him loyal to these his early friends, when other men had set theirs aside for swifter machinery—and so he could give to Clare the joy of a leisurely travelling—towards the goal of a romantic arriving.

Clare loved to watch his firm strong hands on the reins—to feel his arm pressed lightly against hers; to be with Martyn in the open spaces—with the searching wind—the clean earth—the penetrating sunlight.

Each day she was discovering something fresh in the man who had won her. The discoveries were not all beautiful, but



to her he remained the lover—still strong in his self-control, although she had given herself to him; still wooing her with a restrained passion that riveted the bonds more firmly round her life. But now she knew something of him as a fighter. She had had glimpses of a strange unreclaimed region hidden beyond the cultivated area so sternly controlled. She realized that—for better for worse—life with Martyn would never become monotonous.

Far away along the road a tiny speck appeared. It grew in distinctness until Martyn's keen eyes recognized a car he would fain have avoided. His attention became concentrated—his forehead wrinkled into a frown. His hold on the reins tightened as he drew a little farther to the left without altering the pace.

Wilfred Cavendish—alone in the car—had recognized the dog-cart while there was still a considerable distance between himself and it. He slackened speed, his pulses throbbing painfully, his hands on the wheel unsteady in spite of his efforts after control. Would Martyn recognize him? Would he forgive? If only Martyn would be his friend again he would forget the hard things that he had said—the hard things he had done! Wilfred hoped against hope....

When they were nearly level, the eyes of the two men met.

Wilfred was painfully conscious that this was the man who for years had been his hero and friend; his brown eyes pleaded for forgetfulness of the things that had come between. But in the glance that met his there was forgetfulness only of the good—it was steady in its remembering contempt. That glance could never have wounded Iva deeper than her self-esteem, for she had never

seen the tenderness; but Wilfred had seen, and the loneliness its departure had left was robbing him of his manhood.

The contemptuous look seemed to drive the lad to madness—the madness of a hate that must hit back at all costs.

For a second his trembling hands on the wheel wavered, then the car suddenly swerved dangerously. Had it done so a moment sooner the honeymoon might have ended then, but the lad's good Angel saved them all. Wilfred had just cleared the dog-cart before he swerved, so it was only himself whom he injured. The car shot across the road, and although he desperately applied both brakes he could not clear the ditch—the front wheels plunged into it, bringing the car to an abrupt standstill with a violent jerk.

Wilfred sprang out. He found that he was trembling so that he could hardly stand, and he knew that it was not because of his own narrow escape, but because of the realization of what, for a mad moment, he had dreamed of doing.

Martyn turned his head with a scornful laugh. Clare turned too.

“Stop, Martyn!” she cried, putting her hand on her husband's arm—utterly at a loss to understand the meaning of that laugh. “He may be hurt. We must go back!”

Martyn shrugged his shoulders as he flicked Kangaroo lightly with his whip.

“Don't trouble! He'll pick himself up all right.”

He drove on sharply through the quiet country lanes—suddenly out of harmony with the one he loved best. He could not forget the lad who had once been his friend. The knowledge of his own strength brought him a dogged

satisfaction—he did not recognize its brutality—but the beneficent peace around withdrew its echo from his soul.

Among the bright red hips on the hedges the robin sang his evensong to the departing day. The gorse gave promise of a renewal of gold. The sun, dropping to the west, was unaccompanied by cloud. Yet the hearts of two men harbored the ugliness of hate—upon the heart of a woman there fell the shadow of their loss....

But Jim still sat on the stone wall—waiting for the brother who delayed his coming—dreaming of the hero with the radiant bride he had been picturing to himself for so long; and his boyish love over-flowed to them all.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *HOME*

CLARE was at heart a home-maker. In past days as she walked to and from her work, she had sometimes dreamed dreams; simple dreams of a home made beautiful for one whom she would love.

She pictured forest oak, and cedar, and elm, fashioned for that home; rich and gorgeous materials adding to its beauty; sun-ripened fruits and free-growing flowers and sweet perfumes—together contributing to make it as King Lemuel's virtuous woman's of old. To that home she would give the service of perfect freedom. In it there would some day be soft baby lips to kiss, and the touch of childish fingers; then all the lonely silences would be forgotten in the sound of little feet.

When those dreams had made her heart ache, Clare strengthened her heart by work.

It was after work had failed her, and her own home was gone; when love had departed, and the long future stretched dark with shadows, that her brightest day had dawned. Martyn had come, and in the light that he brought she had visioned her dreams fulfilled.

A few years before, Martyn had bought for himself a house on the southern border of the London area, with one of those rambling gardens, rich in trees and shrubs, that are fast disappearing before the pressure of the housing problem, and the need of many homes where one before sufficed.

Martyn beautified the house for the woman he loved. When Clare came to it she transformed it into a home with a

beautiful soul.

How she loved it! Her dreams of carved forest trees, of metals wrought with skill, of fresh fragrant linen, of rich colors and sweet perfumes, were being fulfilled. Flowers too, and broad spaces—tabernacle for sun and moon and stars—were hers, for beyond the southern windows lay the old-world garden, and beyond the garden the green slopes of a park where sheep browsed in the spring and summertime; where in winter, snow lay white and glistening, and a red sun went down in splendor behind a still, white, tree-bound world.

While they were enjoying their first intimate days together Martyn had sometimes talked to Clare of other countries; he had described first hand many interesting places of which she had only read, and they had planned to one day visit them together. But when Clare got home, she knew that she would not want to go away for many, many months—so long as Martyn was content. There was so much to get to know, so much to enjoy, in her own home. The domestic side of home-life fascinated her, and she put herself into it and made it a success.

And the garden—after a few weeks Martyn laughingly protested that he had never thought to find a rival so soon.

Although the summer was long past, and autumn was growing old, the garden had still much to give. November offered unexpected roses. Through several frosts they had kept beautiful and fragrant, and Clare thanked them for their courage as she gathered them for the house.

The rambler roses, whose crimson petals had fallen, spread rich evergreen leaves up to the verandah outside Martyn's study; the garden chrysanthemums yielded bloom and

aromatic sweetness in abundance; and when Clare went out after a shower of rain, the boxwood welcomed her with its other-world fragrance, and the brave little nasturtiums hiding under their umbrellas greeted her gaily with their clean fresh scent.

The trees around the garden were a glory of red and gold and green and yellow. Shrubs—gay-leaved with reds and purples and greens—blazing masses of Azaleas, rosy seed pods, white waxy fruit of snowberry, brilliant clusters on the Guelder Roses—were bringing back the colors of flowers that had gone; while Michelmas Daisies, large and small, purple and lilac and white, bloomed in their quieter beauty, defying rain and frost.

Clare bought herself many long-coveted garden books and discovered every day there were more things that she did not know.

It had not taken her an hour to win over Lambert, the lean, sad-faced, middle-aged gardener, who was devoted to Martyn. Lambert had reckoned himself a failure before he knew Martyn. He was inherently refined, thoughtful and conscientious; but sickness had robbed him of his job; the wife was keeping their home together, and the man's courage and pride were nearly broken. Then Martyn had found him, and had made a place for both him and his wife—in his home. Lambert had again become a self-respecting man. From that time on he worked diligently, with considerable knowledge but little imagination. He could appreciate Martyn's books more readily than he could appreciate his garden.

Clare's coming made things different. Quite unconsciously he began to look at the garden, even the vegetable garden,

through her eyes.

He owed very much to Martyn, and Martyn's books had enlarged his thoughts; but they would never have shown him anything in cabbages beyond the requirements of his wife in the kitchen. Clare made him see a beauty in their healthy rows early in the autumn morning, when the sun found their glittering diamonds, left by the mist of the night, among the warm purples and reds and greens of their great glistening leaves.

After his first fears, Lambert found that the presence of an enthusiast added to the interest of his work.

At the beginning he had to tell her what was hidden in the beds, and what would be revealed when spring and summer returned. Clare talked to him of the things she had long wanted. She pictured a bed of tall St. Bruno Lilies, with their milk-white flowers and slender blue-green leaves, making a background for a mass of homely London Pride. Lambert had never attempted that combination. Clare made him see the bed next June. They ordered new plants of the lily and planted the bed together.

Clare told him she must have plenty of lavender. Lambert showed her the bed that would be a mass of fragrant bloom next summer. He had cared for his rose garden, but now he would care more. Clare was greedy for roses. She demanded more tea roses. She wanted briar roses. A Gloire de Dijon must smother the summer-house. She told Lambert of the fragrant little Burnet rose that she had found blooming in a sheltered spot on the Sussex Downs behind Beachy Head, when snow lay round about. Yes, the garden would grow the Burnet rose, Lambert was sure.

She wanted every possible tiny plant that yielded fragrance, to grow between the flags of the old garden paths. She wanted every possible tall fragrant flower that she might supply many homes of the blind.

The idea of the scented garden was new to Lambert, but he roused himself before the thought of its possibilities, and supplemented Clare's ignorance with his own experience.

Clare did just as she liked—learning by her mistakes; she ordered everything she wanted, and Martyn paid the bills.

Some autumn afternoons she worked busily until twilight, digging up the fresh-smelling earth in the company of a robin, until the sunset light rested upon the flaming tree tops under the darkening blue, and looking up she knew beauty unutterable.

Occasionally in the evening she went with Martyn to one of the literary clubs. There she found herself in a different world; a world of men and women whose lives seemed banked by books. Clare had always loved reading and she imagined that she read much, but now she felt she had never read at all. She had seldom had the chance of seeing a book the same year that it was published, and it seemed to her that the men and women she met in these literary circles read them as they were issued from the press. She wondered how they ever found time to do anything else. But they interested her immensely. At first in their company she was just a quiet looker-on, but soon she forgot her shyness and found that she, too, had something to give.

But best of all, to Clare, were the evenings when she and Martyn were alone together in his study; the evenings when she sat quietly reading, while he wrote. She did not know that



Martyn, who had always worked alone, now found a benediction in her silent companionship.

To them both those hours seemed charged with a strange rich intimacy—when he worked absorbed, unhindered, and she, near-by, was lost in one of the books to which she had been a stranger too long.

Clare's reading, though not up-to-date, had trained her judgment, and she was quick to recognize the beauty of that style which seemed so simple just because it was so near to perfection—so effortless, because it was the result of unremitting effort; the style which had made many a lesser writer feel that he would never dare to put pen to paper again. She appreciated the vigor and originality of the brain behind the well-chosen words—the clearness of thought—the independent courage; but she found also humor that was not gentle, and hardness that was strong to wound....

One evening after dinner, as they were sitting together in the study, she made a discovery. The lights were bright, the curtains drawn, the fire sent out a cheerful glow. Martyn had been busy for some time at his desk, while Clare sat on a large cushion in front of the fire, deep in one of his books.

Presently she looked up. As she did so, a sudden memory caught her. Her eyes brightened. She did not return to her book, but looked into the glowing heart of the fire, while around her mouth played a little smile of triumph.

A few minutes later Martyn moved. He put down his pen, took out a cigarette, then drew a chair up to Clare's cushion and sat down. He put his arm round her shoulders and drew her against his knee. Clare leaned her head back against his arm, and as she looked up she saw the eyes that had met Wilfred's with scorn and contempt bright with the light of a

perfect happiness. Martyn had seen the heavens open, and the vision had not faded.

“When was the first time you saw me, Martyn?” she asked unexpectedly.

“Nine thousand seven hundred and fifty-four years ago,” he replied promptly. “You were standing at the door of the wigwam waiting for your savage father to return from his hunting.”

“And what did you do? I forget.”

“I kissed you first—so I captured you!”

Clare imprisoned the hand that held the cigarette. “May I?” she questioned.

“You know it is I who have been captured ever since. You do as you like.”

Clare took the cigarette and placed it carefully on a small table. Then she kept the freed hand in hers.

“But, Martyn—in this life?”

“It’s foolish to narrow the question down to one little life!” he said, his eyes dancing.

“You’re hedging—because you forget!”

“I saw you before you ever saw me—even in this life,” he protested, playing with a stray lock of hair. “I saw you arrive at the cottage, and I nearly offered to carry you upstairs because you looked as if you’d never get there on your own feet.”

“Oh—I wish you had!”

“Certainly I was a fool, I must admit.”

“Is that the first time?”

“The first time I was a fool? Not by a long shot!”

“The first time you ever saw me?”

He leaned down and studied her face.

“No; the first time was when you had lost your way among the stars. You were looking for Venus—don’t you remember? We found her together.”

“You old silly! Of course I remember perfectly! How could I forget? You were so young and beautiful then! And do you remember how gloriously Venus sang? I know you do; but just now I’m considering this life, and you’ll have to own yourself beaten.”

“I should never own that!”

“No—that is one of your faults, dear man. Do you want to hear a story?”

“Is it as good as mine?”

“Better. Are you listening?”

“You’re a trial!” he said happily. “Fire away!”

She looked into the heart of the glowing coals. “I’m afraid my style can’t equal yours, but the story’s delightful.”

“Well you can’t expect to rival your husband. You must be content with the penny plain if he can do the twopenny colored.”

His hand was on her hair. She did not move.

“Once upon a time—”

“A commonplace beginning!”

“Throttle your jealousy! Once upon a time, on a Sabbath morning, a girl was going to Church.”

“Quite the proper thing for the girl to be doing. Certainly not worth more than a penny.”

“She thought it was the right thing too, though the church outside was so beautiful. It was spring time, and the trees were bursting into leaf and flower. An almond tree blossomed against a blue sky—you know how beautiful that would be, don’t you, Martyn?—and all the birds were singing.

“The girl walked slowly because she was enjoying the choir and the peep through the windows that opened into heaven. She didn’t want to get to the inside church too soon. Sometimes its windows were closed!

“There weren’t many people about, so it was natural for her to notice the one man she met. He was very tall and was walking fast. He looked tired, and as if he were too busy to enjoy even the almond tree.

“They passed—and that seemed the end.

“Suddenly the girl heard a sharp howl. She turned. A motor car was just stopping. It had run over a dog.

“A curate passed. He looked across the road, but it was time for his service and he couldn’t wait. The Vicar followed, but he, too, had no time to spare: prayers had to be said.

“But the Vicar and the curate weren’t needed, for the man who was tired came back.

“The girl crossed the road. She watched while the man stooped and examined the dog to see where he was hurt; and while she stood there looking down on the grim stranger and the wounded dog, she had an extraordinary feeling—can you explain it, Martyn?—the feeling that something was happening that counted,—something that belonged to a far-away past and a dim future. It was very strange.”

She looked up at him happily. “Do you remember, dear man?”

“So that was you!” he exclaimed wonderingly. “Yes, I remember! I was chasing round after a man who’d gone off on the loose while his wife was breaking her heart.” He looked at her attentively. “So you were the girl! When did you remember?”

“Only this evening. I was looking at you, and it suddenly came back.”

“That must have been eight—ten—years ago. It’s wonderful! And the links—didn’t I tell you? They were being forged as we found Venus together; when we wandered among the stars where all prose is turned to poetry.”

“Confess you’re beaten!”

“Not at all. Once upon a time....”

“Now you’re romancing!”

“It’s all romance since you came. No—don’t look at me like that, or I can’t go on! Once upon a time, a boy—quite an ordinary boy—was going home from school, when he saw a little girl—quite an extraordinary little girl—in front of him. She was just a tiny tot with very short socks and very long curls;—long golden curls that went all zigzag and somehow got twisted round the boy’s heart. He wanted to run off with her at once, but being a very proper little boy he let her go home with her nurse unmolested.

“When she disappeared he repented of his goodness, so he followed her and knocked at the door.

“ ‘Please can I see Mrs. Ogilvie?’ he asked.

“ ‘She doesn’t live here,’ said the maid.

“The boy looked very surprised.

“ ‘Could you tell me where she does live, please?’

“ ‘I’m sorry, but I don’t know the name.’

“The boy looked at her. He tried to look very nice. Do you think he could have looked nice if he tried hard?”

“ ‘Have you a directory?’ he asked politely.

“I think he must have been a very respectable looking boy, because the maid said ‘Yes,’ and invited him in—just as he intended that she should.

“While he hunted through the directory for the name he didn’t want, the little girl came into the room. The boy was almost afraid to look at her—wasn’t he a fool! He fumbled about with the book. Then he spent a long time writing down an address. The little girl with the very short socks and the very long curls was looking at him all the time. But he couldn’t stay the night. I think she must have liked him, for—what do you think she said? Do you remember?”

Clare pressed his arm, and her laughing eyes met his. “Go on!” she said.

“Don’t you remember? She said, ‘I’d like to kiss you.’ But the boy was so shy he—bolted!

“But I think he kissed her first! Do you remember?”

“I’ve married a novelist!” she said in a happy voice. “But all the same, if you won’t bolt, I’d like to....”

She raised her face towards his, and their lips met.

“Now I want to read to my novelist—may I?”

“Are you a good reader? I’m very critical.”

“I think I can read anything that I care for—well.”

“I hope it isn’t piffle!”

“I hope so, too! It seems to me the most lovely book I’ve ever read; I want to share it with you.”

He picked up his cigarette. "What is it?" he asked smiling, as he lit it.

She held up the book. "Martyn, it's the most beautiful thing you've written!"

There was pleasure in his eyes, but a touch of amusement too.

"My last?" he suggested.

"Yes."

"No, my first."

"It's the last published!" she said in surprise.

"Yes, but it was written first."

"O-h."

"Why are you sorry?" he demanded.

She hesitated. "There is—something—here, that's not in the others, and—"

"You mean—I've gone back?"

"Oh—Martyn.... I—don't know.... Shall I read to you?"

He rose and switched off some of the lights, leaving only a shaded electric lamp, which he placed so that its light fell on Clare alone. Then he returned to his seat and put his arm round her shoulders again as she opened the book on her knees. As his eyes rested on the soft hair which the lamp-light made golden, the novelist was lost in the lover.

Martyn had never heard Clare read before; he had never heard one of his own books read. He had had many exciting adventures in his life, he had been in many strange places, but as the minutes passed it seemed to him that none had touched the deeps like this quiet scene in the lamp-lit study—

nothing had so moved him as the sound of Clare's voice re-interpreting to him the book she loved.

Martyn Royce—the thinker, the fighter, the worldling—the man who was feared because he was so hard—who was hated because he was so uncompromising—who was loved because he could be so merciful—was transported back to the years before he was hard, before he was hated, before, perhaps, he was greatly loved; to the years in which he had seen visions, in which he had known himself a fragment of the great Spirit, and the Divine had seemed immanent in all.

The book-lined room was dim with shadows. The only light was concentrated on the bright head against his knee; the only sound was the low voice that thrilled as Clare read passage after passage of beauty. Martyn listened as if those words were not his own, and he wondered—"Is it possible I really wrote that? I really believed that? But—it is beautiful!"

At last Clare paused. She turned and folded her arms across his knees. The face she raised towards his was pale. He felt that she was trembling.

"Did you know before how lovely it was?" she asked.

"No," he said wonderingly. She had found his soul anew. "No, I wonder how I could have written it when I did!"

"Can you tell me? You seem here to have the secret of things."

"If so, I must have lost it again." He looked into her eyes. "One day I'll tell you something about it. But I can never really tell how I did it. It's the earliest book of mine that's published. Before I wrote that, life had been comparatively calm. It'd never been easy, but ease is no good to anyone. I loved fighting. I'd written things—but nothing to live. I think I'm like my sailing boat—I make no headway in a calm. But



if you know your boat you are superior to currents and squalls. That little craft was launched in a storm and sailed dead against wind and tide. Sometimes I think that it's the best bit of voyaging this seaman has ever done."

"It's great!" she said.

"Yes, I think it is," he agreed simply. "But I don't feel that it's mine. That's why one can't get conceited."

Clare turned over the pages again. "I shall never get tired of it," she said. "Doesn't it inspire you?"

He laughed then. "What do you expect?" he asked gaily.

"At any rate, you've reached a calm now. I hope the inspiration won't cease."

"Calm!" he exclaimed. He took her hand and put it against his heart. "Can't you feel it? Calm, indeed—with you about!"

Then his voice changed. "I am going to write a book all for you," he said. "It will be for you from the first page to the last, and it will be the most lovely thing I've ever written! The critics will say—'What has happened to Martyn Royce—he's never written poetry before!' It will be the most perfect prose-poem of the century! You shall see!"

Clare got up from the cushion. She went to the back of his chair and clasped her hands round his neck.

"And I am giving you nothing," she protested, with a catch in her voice.

"Nothing—except Heaven," he said, as he imprisoned her hands in his.

## CHAPTER XV

### *CIVILIZED SOCIETY AND PRIMAL THINGS*

LADY ALWYN was At Home. Her invited guests were providing entertainment for a number of uninvited ones who enjoyed the hospitality of the pavement outside her house, up to which carriages, motor-cars and taxis drove in seemingly unending procession.

The laundress, who had a front place, shared her enjoyment with the pretty shop-girl who stood next to her.

“My! see them diamonds? They ain’t real—don’t tell me! They’d be a fortune if they was.... There’s a dress what I’d like for my weddin’—with a bit more stuff on the shoulders!... Look at that old thing—thinkin’ she’s thirty! She’s sixty if she’s a day.... There’s a nice boy—I’d like him for my chap. Jolly brown eyes—though he looks as if he’s bin goin’ it a bit. Don’t hurry old man! I want ter look at yer.... My—what hair! Real though! Did you ever see such a complexion? It wouldn’t be that shade if she did my work!”

“I wish she’d waited,” said the pretty shop-girl, as Iva disappeared through the doorway. “She was lovely!”

“Plenty more to come!... Think one of them grandees in velvet’d give us an ice if we asked him? I wish I was rich.”

“Look at this one! Not much is she? But—what a cloak!” The hand that knew little of beauty wonderingly touched its shimmering folds. “And what a car she’s got! Some have all the luck!” and the pretty girl who worked long hours for her few shillings a week, felt that life was a puzzle as she looked after the plain girl who worked not at all for her forty thousand a year.

“If I get a chance I’ll be born a princess next time,” she volunteered.

“Next time!” scoffed the laundress. “Yer don’t suppose there’s a ‘next time’ do yer?”

“I don’t know. Some people say so. It’d be jolly to be a princess.”

“Once is quite enough for me thanks! Life’s too rummy to want to come back to it... Look at this funny chap with the turban! Wouldn’t like to meet him in the dark—would you?”

“Look!” cried the pretty girl excitedly. “That’s the Prime Minister—see? I know him from his pictures. I wonder who that was with him.”

“A Duke, I ’spect,” laughed the laundress—guessing better than she knew. “Why don’t they have tabs on!”

But the kindly-faced Duke had looked so like an ordinary man that the little shop-girl had not recognised him.

“I expect they’re all in now. Let’s go. No! Here’re some more. What lovely horses! Oh, please don’t hurry! I want to look at you.”

“That’s a clever man,” pronounced the laundress keenly. “But I jolly well wouldn’t like to upset him! Oh—the dear! She’s all real,” and the woman on the pavement beamed involuntarily, as Clare stepped from the carriage. “That’s the best we’ve seen!”

“Not the prettiest,” challenged her companion.

“No, but—the happiest! Oh—I dunno.... She makes you feel sort o’ good. Let’s go!”

“She does look happy,” agreed the other, half enviously.

“Yes—I’d like to kiss her,” and the laundress blew a kiss towards the open door as she turned away. But it only

reached the footman—who sniffed indignantly.

Clare did not know that she was being critically discussed as she passed through the crowded rooms with Martyn. Women, seeing her for the first time, were studying her to discover what it was that had attracted the man so many of them had “raved over.” Some—like Lady Alwyn—who had been ready to welcome Clare without question, for her husband’s sake, soon found that she was quite worth knowing for her own; but others had no offering but criticism, and they were blind to any charm in the wife Martyn Royce had chosen.

“Who was she?” inquired a beautifully dressed woman, with cold eyes and thin lips, echoing the question of many.

Iva Charteris studied Clare interestedly.

“No one knows,” she replied. “But she’s getting on. At least she has impressed the Duke!”

“She’s making herself charming!” said the cold-eyed woman bitterly.

Iva laughed amusedly. She was shortly marrying Lord Alwyn’s eldest son. She could afford to be generous.

“I think she’s quite unusually natural,” she volunteered. “I’d like to know her.” But she turned away as her eyes fell on Martyn.

The plain girl was talking to the young Indian who had attracted the interest of the laundress. The possession of forty thousand a year limits the possibilities of new surprises, and Lady Alwyn’s drawing-rooms, even when receiving “the great,” were dull and unromantic to Gwenith Grattan compared with the golden shore where she had picnicked with Jim Cavendish in the summer that was past. But there

was something arresting about this Brahmin Christian of whom Gwenith had heard so much; he might prove to be interesting. The girl looked at the strong young face beneath the white-turbaned head, and felt that even the miracle stories woven round his name might be true. She was wondering whether she would try to find out, when she found that his attention had wandered.

The Indian was looking keenly at the graceful girl who was talking to the Duke. For a few moments he was still, with the stillness of an absolute concentration.

“Do you find her interesting?” his companion asked, breaking in upon his thoughts.

The Brahmin turned. “I’m afraid I was being rude,” he said apologetically, in perfect English. “Yes; she is interesting.”

“Do you find her pretty?” asked the girl again.

“Pretty? I’m no judge of that. But she is individual—she is real.”

His eyes flashed over the room, then returned to Clare.

“Look round,” he suggested quietly. “You will find nothing better. But—can you not see?—a chin like that, and eyes like those, were not given for nothing; they are the result of battles fought and won—in the silence. She ought to be great.”

The girl looked surprised. The Indian’s vision seemed very clear.

“She has married a great man,” she suggested, studying the strong, dark face.

“Great!” he echoed thoughtfully. “He is very young.”

“Young! He’s much older than his wife,” Gwenith responded, surprised by his tone of conviction.

The Brahmin turned to her with a smile that seemed the out-shining of a hidden wisdom.

“But I was not thinking of the few short earth-years,” he explained. “She is far ahead of most of us. But—he is very young.”

“That’s beyond me! What about the *now*?”

“Just now his personality is dominating—it overshadows hers. But in the end.... Yes—I see....”

“He is so strong,” the girl observed, unfurling her fan. The Brahmin was interesting her.

“But she is stronger!”

“Her husband doesn’t know it!” she laughed.

“Neither does she—yet. But hers is the greater strength—that can endure and be still.”

Suddenly the fan between Gwenith’s small strong fingers snapped. The girl was gripping her courage. This Brahmin knew so much. Would he talk to her of the handsome lad with the dreamy brown eyes—to her the only man who counted in all those crowded rooms?

But when a woman wants to speak of ‘the only man’ her courage often fails her. Now Gwenith’s snapped suddenly—like the fan in her restless fingers. The Brahmin was monopolized by a Bishop before it could be renewed, and her chance was gone....

Clare was enjoying the Duke, happily unconscious of the interest she was exciting.

“It’s a real treat to see anyone looking so happy!” the Duke observed, watching her appreciatively.

Her eyes flashed brightly up to his.

“It’s lovely to feel so happy!”

“You don’t look as if you were ever bored.”

“I’m not! Everything’s so delightful and interesting.”

“Tell me the secret. I should like to hear. We’ll go and get an ice—then we can talk. That wonderful husband of yours won’t let you get lost.”

Clare laughed happily. “I’m sure of that!”

As her hand rested on the Duke’s arm, and a hundred eyes followed her through the crowd, she recalled Martyn’s words—as he left her alone in the sunshine—“Wherever you are, I shall find you,” and her eyes were bright....

Later in the evening she found herself talking to the beautiful girl who was to be Lord Alwyn’s daughter-in-law. Clare thought that she had never seen anyone more lovely. Iva recognised her admiration, and delighted in it.

“I wonder if you’ve any idea what excitement you’ve been causing,” she remarked, studying Clare’s gown and wondering who had made it. “Everyone’s been dying to see you!”

“Really?” asked Clare in surprise. “Why?”

“Why?” Iva echoed, smiling. “You see Mr. Royce has so many friends—of course they’ve all been interested.”

“Of course,” agreed Clare. “I hadn’t thought of that. You know my husband?”

“Oh, yes, I know him very well,”—and something in the tone sent the first dart of envy through Clare’s heart—for the times in which others had known him so well, while for her he had not been even a name.

Iva was studying Clare critically. She knew herself to be more beautiful than this girl with the happy eyes; but she had seen husband and wife together, and she was puzzled to know

how Clare had so captured Martyn when she with her beauty had failed. Iva would never suffer greatly—never love greatly—but she hated the thought that Martyn had spoiled her complete enjoyment of another man’s wooing. Iva’s lover was young, he was rich; but he was just Lord Alwyn’s son. His fiancée could not fail to recognize the difference between the mere son of a man, and a man.

Clare saw Martyn in the distance. There was no doubt about his popularity, but—as Wilfred before her—Clare felt that none knew him as she did, for to her only was he the lover.

The beautiful girl at her side looked at her with a smile of amusement. “You don’t know your masterful husband yet!” she thought. “I wonder when you will.”

Clare turned. “What is it?” she asked.

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you,” Iva answered, with a conscious smile; and again Clare realized a thought of Martyn in which she had no part.

He was near to them now. Clare’s face brightened. Iva smiled at her simplicity. But Martyn was passing. Iva flushed. Clare moved from her side and laid her hand on his arm.

“Martyn, you know Miss Charteris, don’t you? We were just waiting for you.”

Martyn turned, unsmiling. He paused in front of Iva, and Clare looked at him in surprise. The courteous gentleman she had been watching was transformed. He bowed, ignoring the hand that was held out to him.

“Yes, I know Miss Charteris very well indeed,” he said, with peculiar emphasis.



Clare saw the color mount the girl's face. Martyn looked at her relentlessly.

"I have not been able to congratulate Mr. Tempest yet," he added coolly, "but I'm glad to have this opportunity of congratulating you."

"You are generous—as ever," said Iva—her eyes angry.

"No, you mistake. I am never that."

Then he turned to Clare. "Gavin Ogilvie is in the picture gallery. You have wanted to meet each other. Will you come?"

Clare looked at Iva. The girl's cheeks were still burning. "Here's Harry!" she exclaimed thankfully, as a handsome weak-chinned man approached them. "I shall hope to see you again, Mrs. Royce. I'm sure we could be friends." But she avoided Martyn's eyes.

She saw him place Clare's hand on his arm—she saw the girl look up at him as they moved away together—then she turned with a smile to meet the man to whom she was betrothed. She told herself that she hated Martyn; but she hated him in measure because she could not hate him entirely, and he had, for the moment, robbed the commonplace of its comfortable content. Life with him would have been unbearable, but the thought of it had made life with another man appear flavourless. He had treated her abominably; but anger made one ugly—she would just forget....

Wilfred Cavendish was doing his best to appear at ease. He had realized the probability of meeting Martyn and Iva when he accepted Lady Alwyn's invitation, but he could not avoid them for ever—so it would be better to get the meeting over. Life might be more liveable afterwards. He more dreaded

meeting the man than the woman. They might never speak—these one-time friends who had so often shared speech and silence—yet it was impossible that they should always avoid each other. Wilfred went to Queen Anne's Gate determined to show that he did not care.

He saw Iva. He found that, after the first effort, he could look at her coolly, critically, without hate or passion—merely with indifference. He realised that her beauty would never again have power to tempt him, her voice never have power to lure. He was free. He could see Iva and not care.

Then he saw Martyn; and he knew that, whatever the evening might hold—dullness would find no place. A moment later his eyes met Clare's, and a sudden resentment gripped him. Why had not Martyn loved her first? How different life would have been then! Could he get an introduction? Certainly not while Martyn was near! Yet he felt that he wanted to know Martyn's wife—whether Martyn cared or not.

Later in the evening he saw the Bishop talking to his one-time friend. The Bishop was not an easy man to escape. Wilfred, trusting to his tenacity, found Lady Alwyn, and enticed her into the gallery, where he knew Mrs. Royce was looking at pictures, with the interesting Scotsman who had the eyes of a mystic.

The introduction came about naturally, and Lady Alwyn—having compassion on the boy who made her “feel choky”—considerately appropriated the elder man, and left Wilfred the happiest companion her rooms possessed.

So Wilfred found himself at last with Martyn's wife, alone in the dim gallery. The mellow glow—kindly treating the old pictures on the walls—the warm cream and primrose of the

woodwork, the exquisite carving round the doors and windows, the harmonious square room itself with its arched ceiling—seemed to Wilfred to make a fitting setting for the girl Martyn Royce loved. He looked at her frank eyes, and again wondered—why had not Martyn met her first? Why could he not have had her for a friend?

“I’m meeting so many interesting people tonight,” Clare said, sinking into one of the deep, soft chairs; “but I’m most pleased of all to meet you, because I have met your brother.”

Wilfred was standing in front of her, one foot on the great pot that held a magnificent palm, his elbow on his knee, his chin on his closed hand.

“That’s my only recommendation,” he said quietly. “I’m Jim’s brother.”

“Martyn has told me all about him,” she responded, her quick sympathy going out to his pain. “At least he told me a great deal. He said that there was so much, that he’d never be able to get to the end.”

“Jim told me that he met you. The interest was reciprocated.”

Clare smiled. “Because he is so fond of Martyn he had a warm welcome waiting for me—in faith.”

Wilfred took his foot from the pot and stood upright.

“Have you seen the Park at night?” he suggested, moving towards the curtained window. “Come and have a look.”

He held one of the heavy curtains back, and she went and stood beside him.

“There’s St. James’s. That is better than this, don’t you think?”

He drew the curtains together behind them, so that the light in the room should not hide the splendid dark. A slight powdering of snow had fallen, and the paths gleamed white between the shadows. The leafless trees spread dark, shapely branches against the lamped orange glow on the horizon; above them the deep blue was gemmed with stars. Here and there a golden light was reflected in the lake where the birds were still in possession; a glimmer of white showed the edge of the frozen track beyond, now whitely covered with snow.

“There’s more suggestion of romance out there,” Clare agreed vividly. “You can imagine that the Park conceals all sorts of beautiful treasures. Aren’t leafless trees beautiful?”

“I suppose they are.” His spiritless tone contrasted strangely with her vital one. He had sought her company, but he was failing to play the game.

“Although they deck themselves in such lovely clothes in the spring and summer and autumn, I’ve been wondering lately whether they are not—like babies—most beautiful without any on at all,” she said, trying to help him. She could not reach his thought.

“I’m not sure about that,” he responded with an effort. “But if you are much with trees you find out how, even when they are bare, they change their appearance with the changes of atmosphere. I had a small farm for some years, and every winter we had to cut down between two and three hundred, just to keep us warm. It seemed a shame.”

“That sounds a big number—but what a warming job!”

“I had about twenty acres of woodland, and the trees taken away didn’t seem to alter the general appearance very much.”

He was looking across the dim starlit spaces. Clare could not see his face, but she knew that he was wanting to talk to

her of something far removed from trees. For a few moments they were silent. No sound came from the Park before them; in the picture gallery all was still; but from the room beyond floated the music of a violin—the merry, lilting music of a light country dance. Clare stood silently sympathetic, waiting for her companion to break through his reserve—if he wished.

“You have found out that Jim worships Martyn,” Wilfred said at length. “Perhaps you don’t know that I once did the same.”

Clare turned quickly.

“That may sound strange from one man about another,” Wilfred went on, “but for years Martyn Royce made my world. He seemed to me so wonderful. No one else counted in comparison. Jim was such a little chap when I went abroad—it’s only now that I’m really knowing him—but Martyn was everything to me. Then—I wronged him.” Clare had never seen a man cry, but in Wilfred’s voice she heard the catch of tears. “He hated me then. He has hated me ever since.”

What could Clare say? She could not discuss her husband. She looked away to the great star-strewn sky.

“And you?” she questioned gently.

“I’ve been hating him hard in return—until tonight.”

“Oh, I’m awfully sorry. Hate hurts so horribly, doesn’t it? Friendship—love—is the only thing worth while.”

“Love! I loved him, as only a man can love a man.” Wilfred’s voice broke. “I know I wronged him, but I owned it. I would have done anything to make him understand, and he wouldn’t listen. He killed love with hate.”

“I don’t think he has done that,” Clare said with conviction; knowing deep-rooted love is never killed except by one’s own hand.

“You love Martyn?” Wilfred demanded, too fiercely dominated by his thoughts to get back to the commonplace.

“Yes,” Clare answered simply.

“And he makes your happiness?”

She looked up at his shadowed face, but did not answer.

“If he does, I’m sorry for you! No. I’m not going to criticise him, you needn’t be afraid. You may be glad one day that I said it. If you let any one creature make your happiness, when that one fails, you’ll find it’s hell. I did it. Some people have religion. I haven’t. I think you have. If you have—stick to it; or one day you will know what despair means.”

He lifted the curtain and stepped back into the gallery. His face was flushed as he turned to Clare.

“Do you know,” he said, with bitter fierceness, “if your husband had found us then, you would have seen what hate is like.”

She looked at him with misty eyes.

“And you are Jim’s brother!” she ejaculated wonderingly. “I know Martyn can be hard—but aren’t you hurting yourself? I—I’m dreadfully sorry.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” he persisted, as she moved across the room.

“Which question?”

“Does he make your happiness?”

The light notes of the violin had ceased. Just beyond the gallery men and women were talking and laughing, eating and drinking; these two alone seemed among primal things—

the mysteries of love and hate. Clare's eyes were troubled as she looked at Wilfred.

"I know what you mean, but—I can't answer."

Then as he turned, she put her hand for a moment on his arm.

"But—Jim's brother—don't you know? there's such a grand big world. And"—she hesitated—"there is always God," she finished.

He looked down at her again.

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely sure!"

"And there is always Martyn!" he responded. "Ah, here is Lady Alwyn; I'll give you into her keeping while we're both safe!"

He left them with a bow. Clare did not see him again.

She was glad when at last Martyn found her and they were free to go home together.

As they waited for a moment in the hall while the footman called their carriage, the Bishop came up with a smile.

"I hope you will bring Mrs. Royce to dine with us one night before long," he said cordially.

"No thank you," said Martyn, without hesitation, "I can't do that. We should only quarrel. You think I'm a worldling—which I am. I think you're narrow. I'm very pleased to meet you on neutral ground, but I can't eat a man's salt and then slang him, so we won't come!"

The two men shook hands in spite of their differences, and a few moments later Clare was alone with her husband.

He drew her hand through his arm as the horses started off.

“We ran into a few enemies tonight,” he observed with a short laugh.

“I wish you didn’t make enemies,” she said emphatically, letting her hand rest in his.

“I expect I shall as long as I live. If a man’s straight, I stick to him. When he isn’t, I tell him what I think of him, and that’s the end. It’s the same with a woman.”

“You don’t allow for mistakes?”

“No.”

“Where does forgiveness come in?”

“Nowhere—with me. I never take a thing back.”

“That’s not strength!”

“What is it, then?” he demanded.

“Just obstinacy,” she pronounced, looking out at the embankment lights reflected on the river, “and—”

“Call it what you like,” he said easily. “It may be wrong—I don’t care. I never repent—it’s so futile.... What did you think of the Duke?”

“I liked him very much.”

“And Ogilvie?”

“He’s a rock.”

“They liked you! You were quite a success tonight.”

“Was I?” she said doubtfully—thinking of Wilfred.

He put his other hand on hers. “Tired, little one?”

It did not seem possible that this could be the same voice that had cut like ice when addressed to Iva. Did Martyn make her happiness? Clare turned to him suddenly.

“Martyn, it is terrible to love!”



“Of course it is, Beloved,” he said very quietly, his eyes meeting hers. “It is the most terrible thing in the world—and the grandest.”

When they reached home Martyn went into his study, and Clare went upstairs alone.

Her cheerful room, with its old oak—its shining glass and silver—its roses on walls and floor—its fresh flowers, and its dancing flames of fire—gave her a welcome. She changed the cream gown that Iva had admired, and loosened her hair. As she brushed it out before the mirror, her eyes met the reflected eyes in the glass, and through them she seemed to be seeing herself.

Such grave eyes were those; eyes that had faced defeat with laughter—eyes that had looked on broken hopes undimmed—eyes that had grown misty for others’ wounds. The two pairs of eyes met each other questioningly; and they could not smile away the accusation that they held.

Presently Clare switched off the lights, and sat down in a low chair by the open window. Her heart was heavy, for she knew that she had failed the man who loved her. Martyn had given her ecstasy—he had led her to new discoveries—he had made her rich beyond telling. Once she had found precious treasures—alone; she had not shared her treasures as he had done.

Martyn did not know that she had failed, but Clare knew. Perhaps the young Indian, who had seen that Clare had so much that Martyn had not, would have understood. Clare thought that Gavin Ogilvie—the man with the mystic’s eyes—knew too.

The tall bare trees swayed in the breeze; sweet night scents were borne to her in the breath of the soft south wind; silver

stars sang in the sky; and in the room below her a man sat writing;—a man who made her world? A man she loved with all the force of her womanhood, but—beyond—

Clare sat alone in stillness, and old thoughts came thronging in....

Martyn knocked and entered. He came over to her side, sat down on a high-backed chair, and drew her head on to his shoulder.

“Dreaming—lady mine?”

“Better than that,” she answered.

“Can I share it?” he asked, his fingers entwining themselves in her loosened hair.

She folded her hands on his knee, and looked up into his face, which the firelight illumined.

“I seemed to be hearing the music that the shepherds once heard on the hills of Bethlehem,” she confessed, conquering her shy reserve. She hesitated, but she had too often kept her thoughts of the Best to herself. She broke down the barrier. “It seemed as if He—Who long ago came hidden in a tiny baby—must come back again as a Christ. Haven’t you sometimes felt that, Martyn? That He must come back to the world that needs Him so; the tired, blundering world that doesn’t know what love is, but knows so much of hate.”

She looked back towards the star-strewn sky.

“Just now He seemed so very, very near,” she added with quiet sincerity. “I was just waiting for His footstep.”

Her husband drew her closer in silence. How could he answer? To Martyn, the woman was nearer than all else.

And to Clare—

## CHAPTER XVI

### *THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST*

IT was dusk. Clare lay in bed, among the flickering shadows cast by the firelight. She had had a sharp attack of bronchitis, but now that the worst was over she found it a luxury to lie in her quiet room, with leisure to gather up her thoughts. But she did miss the study and the garden.

The men in the study and the garden missed her more than she dreamed.

Martyn was out now. He had come to see her before he went.

“I have to meet Tom Foster at half past four,” he explained, as he sat down on her bed. “The chap’s rather a rotter, but one can’t let him go under. He relies on me a bit. Then I’ve promised to dine with a publisher who’s keen on having a talk—bother him! But I’ll try and strangle him and get back by eight.”

Her eyes danced. “I shall watch the clock. But don’t go to extremes with the strangling!”

It was now nearly seven. The maid came in to draw the curtains, but Clare let her only make up the fire. She liked to look out into the gathering dusk; she knew the beautiful things it was shadowing in the garden below. She pictured the waving daffodils, and fragrant narcissi. The snowdrops and the crocuses were past; that had been a great joy. She must not miss the opening of the deep crimson tulips, or the unfolding of the lilac blossom, the laburnum, and the mays. Spring was so lavish; she must be ready for all she would give.

Martyn was learning more of his garden than he had ever known before. He brought news of it every day, and some of its produce.

Clare knew that it was fragrant with sweetbriar; she had a piece under her pillow. By her bed was a low bowl of pansies, cut generously with flower and bud and long leafy stems. Clare put out her hand and touched the rich petals lovingly.

As the twilight deepened she turned and watched the fireglow, and the shadows flickering on walls and ceiling—sprites and fairies sharing with her her treasured possessions.

The clock in the hall chimed the hour. Clare heard the turn of the key. She raised her head eagerly. There was no mistake—three stairs at a time, and the length of the passage in a stride! The door was flung open, and almost as soon as she knew that he had come, Martyn was by her side.

“You said eight!” she said, with a happy laugh.

“Didn’t I tell you once before never to take any notice of anything this man may say!”

“And the publisher?”

“Oh, I managed to strangle him quite satisfactorily to us both.”

“But what about dinner?”

“I’ve had all I want in that line. Now I’ve come to talk to you.”

He drew a chair up to the side of the bed and sat down facing her. He took her right hand in his left, and kept it on his knee.

Clare turned her head so that she could see him better, and laid her left hand under her cheek: she felt the room charged

with mystic romance, as the fireglow showed her the man's strong face, softened to tenderness for her. Eight months of continual companionship—yet Martyn could still rush home like a schoolboy, to the woman who had his heart!

He said he had come to talk. Clare settled the theme without delay.

“Martyn, you've never told me the story of *Morning Glory*. I've been reading it again since you went out, and I can't wait any longer.”

“The one book of mine you think great?” he suggested, looking at her with a smile.

“That's it,” she agreed, answering his smile.

“Do you know, my Clare, you've less curiosity than any woman I've ever met.”

“In what way?”

“You have asked so few questions—although you have married me!”

“But I am curious; only—perhaps—rather shy.”

“You're a marvel!”

“I knew there were shadows, and I have often wondered,” she confessed. “But I knew you would tell me what you wished. You realised that I was ready to share—everything.... I longed to.”

He put his arms round her and held her close.... Then he drew himself upright, and tilted his chair backwards.

“You know I can lie when it's necessary,” he began unexpectedly, looking at her gravely, “but I shall never lie to you. When I told you I was without ties that was true; but the one that some sentimentalists consider the most sacred of all

was severed, not by death, but by marriage. My mother is living—more or less happily—with her second husband.”

His tone was bitter. Clare could not speak. A moment later he went on more easily.

“That was beginning at the end—a very bad beginning. I can’t get my thoughts straight tonight, somehow. You send them all awry.... I never waste time in vain regrets, but I’ve often wished you could have known my father. I have wished even more that he could have known you. But I think perhaps he does that. It’s impossible to think of him as *dead*. You would have loved him. He was a far better man than I shall ever be. He was one of the cleverest, too, though he never made a name in the world. He wasn’t practical enough, or hard enough, to fight for the things he wanted. His whole tastes were scientific. He dreamed over chemicals as you dream over sunsets. He worked for years on the verge—as he thought—of a great discovery. He went, taking his secret with him, and the world never knew him.

“Here’s one of the problems one has to give up: why was he—who was worth so much—at the mercy of a woman who was worth so little? How could the shallow overcome the deep? A paradox that I can’t solve.

“There’s more silly sentiment wasted over mothers than over anything else in the world! A good mother, just because she is a good woman, may be great; so much greater than a man that her greatness mocks him. But the mother who is not good! Why be hypocritical about her? I hate pretence. The wife who is the opposite of all a man needs can make his life a hell. That was the sort of mother and wife I knew in my boyhood. I’m not exaggerating. I’ve never talked of it before, but I’m giving you the truth. It isn’t beautiful. I can’t beautify

it when I think of my father. My mother wasn't criminal—as the world reckons; she was, in fact, a “good” woman; but the home she made was no home, through the madness of her temper, the stupidity of her jealousy.”

Martyn caught sight of Clare's wistful eyes and he curbed his anger.

“It's difficult to be calm when one sees a fine life ruined by constant contact with a life that is paltry. Perhaps it was impossible for her to comprehend. My father never criticised. I'll try not to again. But I promised to tell you what produced that book.

“When I was sixteen my father left us. He'd never been strong. If he had had care he might have lived for years. He never thought of taking care of himself, and my mother took no trouble.

“I dreamed dreams in those days, little one! I meant to be nearly as clever a man as my father—I knew I could never be quite. But I saw how he suffered through the blows that hurt him, so I made up my mind never to let things hurt me. Seeing my father suffer made me hard. I know it wouldn't have made everyone so—but it did me....

“Another thing I learned—the stupidity of the idea that jealousy is a proof of love. The woman who is really jealous doesn't know what love means! She knows something low and selfish; she doesn't know love. When I see a faded beauty keeping her husband at her side for her own selfish gratification instead of being glad for him to share clean pleasures and thoughts with other men and women—I want to wring her scraggy little neck!”

Clare pressed his knee. “Don't be so fierce, dear man. We can let jealousy alone. Go on.”

“Where was I? Oh—my dreams! Yes; they’d have beaten yours then. But there was life; and there was my mother. She had never cared for me. Sometimes, I think, she almost hated me. I can’t pretend to be surprised. But as she had no one else, we had to make the best of it. One thing after another that my father had tried had failed—just because he was great without being practical. After he went we found that there was no money. So I had to leave my dreams.

“I had one uncle—my father’s brother, and his antithesis. He was a rich merchant. He had no children. He offered me a place in his office. There was my mother—so I left my dreams and accepted the office. My uncle was rather pleased with the experiment. He found I could be of value to him. My heart wasn’t in it—but one can’t always consider one’s heart! I determined to make a better job of it than my uncle was doing, though he was a man with a long experience, and I was a boy with none. Conceit? I don’t know! I just knew I could—and I did!

“There wasn’t any glamour about life in those days. The great factory was in the centre of a wretched neighbourhood. I didn’t walk backwards and forwards without seeing things. And at home ... well, it wasn’t great. I meant to know things that my father knew; but I meant to know the world as he hadn’t known it. I worked hard. I studied for a degree and took it. It wasn’t easy—because money was scarce, and I only had the evenings and Sundays. But I wanted it, and I got it.... I remember the day I sold my coat to buy a book I needed. Great days those, Clare!

“My mother objected to my studies as she had objected to my father’s work. She wouldn’t have objected if she could have seen money in them, but that needed longer sight than



she possessed. I think I am quite fair to her. She had her own interests, which I couldn't share. If I hadn't worked every minute I had I should have gone to the devil!"

His left hand was still closed over Clare's right. She took her other hand from under her cheek and put it on his right, which was resting on his knee.

"I'm very glad you worked then," she said earnestly.

"Yes; it was the only thing. Between times, I wrote. Parts of that book—some of the parts you love best—were written in those days. They were put together afterwards. When you read it to me, I wondered how I could have written it then. I mustn't grow eloquent about it; but—you think the book wonderful. At least the way it was written was—I think—wonderful. I had no home life, so I imagined a home and made it beautiful. I didn't know what love was, so I pictured love as I wanted it to be. One night when I felt hatred stronger than usual in the atmosphere, I went upstairs and wrote one of those love scenes, which you think beautiful; and I described a wife and mother whom the public had grown to love.

"You think that book true to life. It was the antithesis of my life. I made it strong because weakness seemed everywhere. You found a great faith there. Things seemed so utterly wrong that I had to believe; and somehow faith grew as I pictured it. There was only coldness in life as I knew it, so I had to create my own fire. When you read it to me, I felt that the book wasn't mine. I think the visions were given because life would have been impossible without them. I didn't ask for sympathy; I made my own world....

"I used to read the Bible for style. I'm still filled with envy at the power of that Eastern physician who recorded the story

of the Birth at Bethlehem. It were worth living to have written that alone....

“I didn’t get too absorbed in my work to notice things outside. I knew if I was ever to become a writer—and that was what I meant to do—I must be able to live in other people’s lives. Everything I could find would come in useful. There were bad enough things to see in the factory itself, if one’s eyes were opened. How I loathed it all at times! And in the streets, I saw horrors. I saw children with frightened eyes who did not know what love meant. I saw pretty little girls whose prettiness had no chance of showing through the dirt until their mother died and they were washed and put into new clothes to go to her funeral. I saw brutal men and coarse women who apparently knew no reason for existence beyond selfish gratification of vice and lust. I saw hungry babies tugging at the dry breasts of mothers whose eyes showed starvation. I saw—and knew—young men who gave themselves up to low vice and didn’t know they were being brutes. I saw all these things, and a hundred others, equally hateful. That was why I wrote of those beautiful things you love. But one day I am going to write of the brutal things I know....

“Do you understand? If I couldn’t have believed that somewhere at the heart of things was righteousness, I should have gone mad! So I wrote of love and beauty, and I believed what I wrote. The more I wrote, the more I believed. I saw hearts—brutal, degraded, black—but I believed that somewhere—hidden deep away perhaps—the Divine was immanent in all, as I found His thought in the dewdrop, the impress of His fingers in the rose.

“And now—” He paused.

A cinder dropped from the fire on to the hearth, breaking in upon the silence.

“And now—” he repeated, as Clare’s hand pressed his. “Well, little one, I think it is—the less reason, the more faith. Since then—I have reasoned. I’m sure of justice at the heart of things, but I think it’s futile for us to try and understand. The visions have faded.”

Clare did not speak; she found words impossible. She was realising the capacity for suffering of this lover sitting by her side in the dusk, his hand on hers.

“You know what loneliness means, Clare,” he said, looking at her shadowed face. “It’s one of the things one doesn’t talk about. More people in the world are lonely than perhaps you will ever guess. The only thing that makes the loneliness bearable is work: work, if possible, for others, but, anyway, work.”

He paused, then went on in a different tone.

“Oh, I had some times in that office! There were ructions, you can guess! But I got my way. Some of the things were improved. My uncle was wanting to kick me out half the time for my impertinence; the other half he wasn’t knowing how to be thankful enough because he saw the affair was paying better than it had ever done. I nearly chucked it several times. I wanted my independence. But I knew I should have been a damned cad if I had. One must consider other people’s rights, and my father had left me obligations. I couldn’t throw them over. What a world it would be, if we could just do as we liked! Then, when I was twenty-two my mother married again and—I was free.”

There was a lump in Clare’s throat. She was glad there was no light beyond the fireglow. There was no note of sentiment

in Martyn's voice. He was simply making a matter-of-fact statement of that which appeared to Clare in the light of a tragedy.

"I was free," he repeated. "My mother had chosen for herself—badly enough, as far as I could learn; but my obligations ceased. I was getting a good salary then. In a year or two I should have been rich. I hadn't been able to save much, but what did that matter? I wanted my freedom. My uncle was furious. If I stayed I should be a partner. If I went he would have nothing more to do with me. His money would go to a distant relative."

He laughed. "You can imagine me staying—can't you? My uncle spent his soul in the office, and had no idea of what was going on in the world. He had very few lucid intervals between his money-making. I might have grown like him if I had stayed. I went!

"It was uphill work, but I was my own master. I would never be another man's servant again. Of course I was poor for a long time. I wrote articles for money, but writing's a shaky thing to depend on for one's daily bread. I told you I made a success of slogans. Many a man starves while he is waiting for recognition. I nearly did more than once. But it was worth it! And as I said once before, starving isn't the worst part of being poor. It must be hell, if you have others dependent on you; but if you're alone there are compensations.

"Oh, the days when editors and publishers seemed to hold my fate in their hands!" He laughed again. "It's different now. The tables are turned. And the public—I belong to them; and the critics know it. It was a great day when I found the reviews worth measuring, instead of reading. And the

book you love! I put it together when I was hungry and alone, and everything seemed wrong. I sent it to several publishers. Of course it seemed to me they would welcome it with joy. But they all refused it! I don't even now know exactly why. At last I put it away. I loved it. I'll confess that. I had a bit of sentiment then. I was always glad to get that manuscript safely back into my own keeping. Presently I said it should travel no more; it was too precious.

"My next book took. I didn't get very much for it at first, but I had made a start. I've never gone back since. When I took my beloved first-born out once more, and offered her to the world, the world welcomed her as wonderful, and found her beautiful. People say how true it is. Blind fools! It's just because it's so untrue that it is beautiful."

His tone had grown bitter again. Clare's fingers tightened round his.

"No, Beloved," she said, "you're wrong! It's because it's true. You found truth as beauty because you were a seer."

"You always believe the best—as my father did. Go on believing it! Perhaps one day—" he looked at her questioningly.

"The visions will be given back," she said, with conviction, "and you will find your dreams again."

"I wonder...."

For a few minutes there was silence; then Martyn rose.

"It's time you had something to eat, and then you must go to sleep. I'm wanting you about the house pretty badly, so hurry up and get strong."

"I feel strong now."

“You won’t be quite so self-reliant when you try to walk. Tomorrow—if you are a very good child—I’ll carry you downstairs, and you shall sit by my fire again.”

“You dear!”

She caught his hand as he was moving away.

“Martyn, where is your mother now?”

“I don’t know. They went abroad. I’ve not heard for years. The man was a scamp, I believe. Thought he was getting some money. He soon found out his mistake!”

“She never writes to you?”

“Why should she? No; she never writes.... Here’s your supper. Alice will give us a light.... That’s better. Now are you going to sit up? You can’t eat like that, lazy one! Let me fix this other pillow. That better? Now eat every scrap Alice has brought, then sleep the sleep of the just.

“And don’t forget tomorrow!”

## CHAPTER XVII

### *FELLOW FARERS*

THE book that Martyn had promised to Clare was born at the dawn of the springtime; it grew with the opening buds; the blossoming lilacs, tossing their scent to the breezes, saw its progress; the glory of the laburnum drooped over its unfolding chapters, as Clare read them in the garden beneath its golden shade.

The dedication of the prose-poem was—*To My Wife*.

For Clare that freshness of the new-born day, and the dauntless pride of life's high noon. For her that virile music of triumphant springtime, and the echo—clear, unwailing—of a winter that was past.

Men and women, reading Martyn's book would share his best thoughts with Clare; through them they would find new faith for life, new courage for its terrors, new vision for its surprises; for *Fellow Farers* was close to the heart of life—life enchanting, potentially splendid; life whose centre is love.

Clare found herself so rich while the world still held empty hearts; she must share her treasures with all whom she could reach.

She often thought of those children of whom Martyn had told her, when he sat by her bed in the firelight, and she thrilled responsive to his story; the pretty little girls whose prettiness had no chance of showing through the dirt until their mother died, and they were washed and put into new clothes to go to her funeral. Clare tried to make friends with the guardians of such defrauded childhood, and inspire them

to womanliness, so that life, not death, should give their children beauty. There were little children whose eyes were old; Clare took them love, and sought to reclaim for them their lost birthright, while she kept their hands in hers. There were girls whose thoughts had been sullied from babyhood; Clare tried to help them to find beauty, that foul memories might be blotted out.

Lonely women without homes, tired men whose success was meagre, workers whose days were drab, and children who had never bathed in sunlight, visited the old-world garden during those beautiful spring days. They went away the richer, yet Lambert did not find the garden growing poor.

While Martyn wrote, Clare annotated his book in life.

Martyn's greatest interests were human and psychological. Although he had kept his old-world garden unspoiled, he was far from Clare's inherent nature worship; he enjoyed its beauty now as he had never enjoyed it before, as he shared it with Clare in the rich leisure she guarded as a cure of souls. He was none-the-less interested in her visitors, for they were of his studies; pages to be scanned, leaves to be turned—then left as soon as mastered. But the men whom he counted his friends—some of them among the notable, some among life's failures—these he never left. Clare found them in many different guises: the policeman on the beat; the little bent historian, whom Martyn told her had learned the secret of living three hundred years without senile decay; the man who was "rather a rotter," who took Martyn for his saviour; the renowned archæologist who recommended her always to take a monument with her breakfast rather than the daily paper; and, best of all, the Scotsman with the mystic's eyes whom she had first met among Lord Alwyn's pictures.



Gavin Ogilvie had a personality as strong as Martyn's, though less dominating. Clare found in him a friend. She hardly acknowledged to herself that he possessed something that her husband lacked, that to her was very precious.

The tall, fine figure, the strong bronzed face, the neck—free in its soft collar—tanned by the sun and wind, spoke the lover of the open, the possessor of abounding physical life. The wrinkles round the blue-gray eyes spoke of humor, of ready sympathetic understanding. The eyes themselves told the mystic—the man who, with his feet firmly fixed on the solid earth, yet found his home among the stars. The fine, well developed head was covered with thick iron-gray hair, which had a trick of tumbling over his forehead. That thick rebellious lock had teased many a mothering woman, as perhaps Gavin Ogilvie knew.

Yet Tom Foster, whom Martyn had met that day he had rushed back to Clare like a schoolboy, an hour before the promised time, came into Clare's life more quickly than Gavin Ogilvie, because he needed more.

Clare one day told the Scotsman of her first meeting with Foster, as he walked with her in her garden in the early evening.

“Martyn introduced a fiery, brainy, overwhelming young man to me just as I was having a delightful time with a real historian,” she said communicatively. “Before long I was lost. Mr. Foster was talking about *The Way of all Flesh*. I had never heard of it, nor of Samuel Butler. The only Butler I knew was the author of *The Analogy*. My ignorance of the Butler of *The Flesh* slipped out, and I felt Mr. Foster's scorn.” She imitated the young man's superior air. “Before it could wither me I quoted *The Analogy*,” she finished.

Galvin Ogilvie laughed appreciatively.

“You had him there, I’m sure!”

“Yes, fortunately. He had never read it. I told him of its place among classics; its English style; its influence on thought. His lofty scorn dwindled. We were quits.”

The Scotsman looked at her keenly.

“Butler’s *Analogy* is for intellectual doubters, not for natural mystics,” he observed.

“I revelled in it when I was a schoolgirl,” she responded, “but I don’t know why.”

“Because of its English, perhaps. Butler is not needed by the one who opens his soul to the Divine as naturally as the bud unfolds to the sun.”

Clare was silent. All around, the birds were singing. The air was fragrant with the scent of growing things. The westering sun was casting long shadows on the broad green lawn, and intensifying the varying greens of the tall trees beyond. Just beside them was an apple-tree laden with blossom, and beyond, a bed of red tulips backed by dark green, with brighter sun-flecked green above. Before the tulips lay a delicate patch of sunlight. Clare looked at the deep red blooms. They, too, knew something—that they could not tell. Then to guard her thoughts, she turned again with a smile.

“Now whenever I feel a ‘Have you read—’ coming down on me from a book-worm, I whip out my foil. ‘Have you read—J. B.?’ If he hasn’t he can’t be scornful when he tells me of something good I, too, have left unread.”

Clare glanced towards the house as they moved on together in the sunshine.

“Mr. Foster is with Martyn now,” she observed. “He comes very often. He seems to rely on Martyn. I am afraid he tires him dreadfully. Yesterday they spent a long day together, tramping the hills round Kenley and Caterham. Martyn came back fagged out. Yet he is strong and loves walking.”

“Some men rob others of their vitality quite unconsciously,” Gavin Ogilvie explained. As Clare looked at his serene face, clear in the evening light, she realised that neither man nor woman would rob the Scotsman, who kept his strength impregnable.

In his study Martyn was patiently helping Tom Foster to battle with his problems. Foster had fallen in love with the wife of a fellow journalist. He had confided in Martyn because he could not confide in himself. Martyn’s final suggestion was offered from his own creed, not from his worldly knowledge.

“If you two really love each other, why don’t you ask the other chap about it? No decent man would keep a woman who didn’t want to stay!”

Foster laughed ironically.

“He’d merely knock me down—unless I got in first.”

“Not if he really loves her! He’d let her go if she wanted to.”

“He wouldn’t! Not he!”

“Then he doesn’t love her. What does she think about it?”

“She thinks she ought to forget me.”

“Of course she has her obligations,” admitted Martyn judiciously, “she must consider those. If she feels like that, the only decent thing you can do is to clear out.”

“I can’t!”

Then Foster went over again the story that he had told many times—with additions to bring it up to date; and Martyn listened analytically, though *Fellow Farers* was lying on his desk in the sunshine calling him to come. He knew that reason and satire are powerless in the presence of an elemental passion, yet what else had he to offer?

“You’re not working enough!” he said at last energetically.

“Working! I can’t work.”

“But you can—and must! Leave last year’s roses and all the other sentimental tosh, and get back to your old squibs of commonsense!”

Foster flushed. Evidently Royce did not understand.

“Why, buck up, Tom,” Martyn admonished. “You were never made to be a groveller!”

“It sometimes seems easier than to be a man.”

“Does it?” Martyn questioned curiously. “You say you can’t help letting go. How hard have you tried?”

“Just as hard as I know. I can’t stand it much longer.”

Martyn studied him critically.

“You don’t look as if that hardness had been very hard!” he remarked. “Look here, if you’ll do your level best, I’ll help you. I don’t know that I’ll be much good. You must do your share.”

He walked up and down the room restlessly. His home was very precious to him. Then he stopped in front of the man who had no home.

“Look here, Tom,” he said bluntly. “I’m awfully busy, and I can’t be entertaining people at all hours for sport; but if you’ll do your best to keep away from—the flame, you may come here just whenever you feel it’s getting too hot for you.

You understand? You mustn't go to her! She's better without you. When you feel you must—come along, and we'll help you throttle the devil."

A few minutes later Foster departed. Martyn returned to his study, having taken on himself more of the man's weakness than he knew. He crossed to the open French window, to see Clare and his friend in the garden.

The two were standing beneath the gold of the laburnum. Clare was feeding the sparrows, and listening to a story of St. Francis. For a moment Martyn stood at the window, his eyes on a three-fold glory—of sunlight, blossom, and a woman's hair. Then he went down the steps and joined them.

"Mr. Ogilvie is staying to dinner, Martyn," Clare announced.

Martyn laughed. "You don't know what you're in for. Ogilvie lives on nuts and apples! Your housewifely skill will be wasted."

Clare looked at the fine figure, so full of force and vitality—at the clear, fresh complexion; whatever the Scotsman lived on had certainly contributed to the making of a man.

"You shall have whatever you like," she told him, "and perhaps you will give me some cookery hints?"

Over the sociable meal Martyn forgot his weariness, but when Gavin Ogilvie rose to go he remembered Foster again.

"Sit down a minute, if you're not in a hurry," he said, "I want your help."

"It's yours," agreed his friend.

"You saw that fellow, Foster, the other night—what did you think of him?"

“He hasn’t found himself yet. He’ll be all right when he does.”

“I want you to help him a bit. I know you’ve something that I haven’t, and he needs more than I can give him. It’s all right when he’s with me, but when he’s away the influence weakens. I can’t carry him on my shoulders for ever. You can give him something that will be independent of anyone’s presence.”

“I see,” said the Scotsman simply. “It’s his to have, but perhaps he wants someone to put him in the way of it.”

“He’s got such a confoundedly weak will!”

“If he had a strong one and relied on it, it still wouldn’t get him far.”

“I don’t agree there, Ogilvie!”

“Well,” Gavin responded, with his quiet smile, “great men have tried it all down the ages without success.”

“I see,” interposed Clare. “‘The good that I would, I do not—’ ”

“Yes. That law has a modern name—as if it were a modern discovery,” he said, turning to her responsively. “It’s really very, very old. The imagination holds the real desire. Unless you can enlist that on the side of your will, defeat is certain.”

“As Paul found centuries ago,” suggested Clare.

“Yes—and called it religion; so men find to-day—and call it science!”

“Well then, will you look after his imagination?” demanded Martyn bluntly. “I’ll leave it to you!”

“Ah, you’ve given me a job!”

“Martyn is writing the most beautiful book he has ever written!” Clare volunteered, as their friend prepared to go.

“It’s all on the heights; bathed in heating sunlight, and fresh, clean breezes.”

Martyn laughed shortly. “It’s nearly finished—then I’ll give the public a change!”

Clare looked at him questioningly. He was looking at Gavin Ogilvie.

“Clare says we’ve been on the heights. It’s been bracing; but one can’t stop there. The next book will go down to the depths.” Clare fancied that she caught an echo of Tom Foster. “There are ugly things down there,” Martyn went on harshly. “Brutal things—vile things; things people won’t admit exist because they’re unpleasant. Statesmen don’t trouble to clear up the mess. People pretend to be civilised! They’ll have to wake up and see below the veneer once more! I began the book long ago, but—” he looked at Clare with a queer smile, “she put me off.”

His friend looked at him keenly.

“For the Passion Play, they choose the best man in the village to take the part of Judas,” he suggested quietly.

“And the inference?” said Martyn shortly.

“The portrayal of evil is tremendously suggestive to the artist.”

“Are you afraid for me?” demanded Martyn, with a touch of contempt.

“I am never afraid,” Gavin said, with an understanding smile. “But it’s good to recognise the enemy.”

Then he turned to Clare. She felt he had power: he wasted no words. His handgrip was warm and strong. She stood on the steps with Martyn and watched him depart; then the two fellow farers went back to the study together.

“Are you going to work any more tonight?” she asked, as Martyn seated himself at his desk.

“I’m afraid I can’t. I was dying to earlier; it was burning for utterance—a fire in my bones. It has cooled down now. The inspiration has gone.”

He lit a cigarette.

“I must write some letters, and then ... then, little one, you shall do as you like with me, and we will forget the stupid old world.”

Clare crossed to the open French window. All day the sun had been shining over the grass, and wooing to fragrance the scents of the garden. Now the moon was high, and the night was glorious. Clare stood just outside the window, sharing earth’s splendid joy....

Presently she heard Martyn move. She did not turn. Then she felt him near; his arm was round her shoulders.... Earth was forgotten.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### *THE BOOK AND LIFE*

*FELLOW FARERS* was finished.

When Clare received her specially bound copy, with its dedication "To My Wife," and an inscription in Martyn's handwriting that was for her alone, she felt that she had reached the summit of her pride.

But not of her desires.

Once and again, compelled by a hunger that would not be conquered, Clare had left the writer in his study, the flowers in her garden, and had gone to Pam Hillier and her children. She played hide-and-seek with the golden-haired girlie of two; she made puzzles for seven-years-old Rex, while he curled himself up close beside her, his head against her arm; she made friends with the nurse, and obtained possession of the baby, and indulged a radiant dream of motherhood—the little one in her arms.

When she was again in Martyn's room—when he turned to her with a light in his eyes that only she had ever seen, and a ring in his voice that others had not heard; and when at last he gave her completed the book that was all her own—Clare told herself that her longing was the avarice of an actual millionaire. Only—only—Martyn did all the giving. Pam could never love Morton as she loved Martyn, and yet she had given him so much more. Had Martyn all he wanted? Clare never dared to ask.

When the book was published they spent a week together in Paris, and then went for a few days to Lord Alwyn's country house. Wilfred's home was only a mile distant, and

Jim sent a loving boyish letter inviting his friends to tea. He explained that he was a prisoner, and Wilfred was away. He wanted them tremendously. The next day Clare went alone, directly after lunch.

For a week Jim had not been able to walk. Clare found him lying on a long lounge chair by the lake, beneath the shade of the beech tree. He had been suffering greatly, yet his first thought when he saw Clare was of the book he had just finished.

“Isn’t it lovely!” he exclaimed, as Clare stooped and kissed him. “It was topping of you to give me a copy. Of course I was going to buy one. I’d saved up. But this is much more valuable.”

As Clare sat down beside him her eyes were misty. She had not learned to be no more sorry for Jim than Jim was for himself.

They were firm friends now. Jim had paid them a few brief visits, and each one had deepened Clare’s love for the boy who was so brave and bright and loyal. His adoration of herself was very sweet; his conviction of her beauty and wisdom was one of the sincerest compliments she had ever received.

When he confided to Martyn his opinion that Clare was the cleverest as well as the most beautiful girl he had ever met, he confirmed his powers of discrimination by adding, “and that’s saying a great deal, because I know Lady Alwyn, and she’s awfully clever; and I know the Honorable Iva, and she’s lovely!”

“I’ve bought a copy of *Fellow Farers* for Wilf,” he said proudly.

Clare blinked away her tears, and turned her eyes from the brilliant yellow broom against the belt of young Scotch firs she had not been seeing.

“Have you given it to him yet?”

“Yes. He came home this morning. He’s been away a week. I had it ready. You know I’ve had to stay in bed, but I had the book for company. I kept it by me all the time—except when I washed,” he added with a merry laugh. “Then I made La Belle put it as far away as possible, in case it got splashed. I love making a splash! Don’t you?”

“Washing’s rather tame if you don’t,” agreed Clare.

“La Belle’s an old dear,” he explained. “She tells me stories, and I tell her some. I like to make her feel creepy! She used to read the paper to me.” He grinned appreciatively. “You should hear her pronounce the names! I have to say them after her to see how they sound in my voice. But—she’s a dear! and of course it’s difficult to know about names, isn’t it?” he added in defence.

He drew Clare’s gift from under his cushion.

“Look, isn’t this a fine bit?” he said, opening it where he had placed some rose leaves. “I want you to read it to me.”

Clare saw the sparkle in his eyes with happy pride. She leaned over to share the book, and they re-read many pages of *Fellow Farers* together. What a companion the child was!

“We’ve been disappointed that you haven’t been for your real long visit yet, Jim,” she said presently, after they had closed the book. “When are you coming?”

“I’ve been jolly disappointed too! But you see I mustn’t miss school when I can go, because I often can’t. Then as soon as I get a holiday, I get laid up—like an idiot!”

“Yes—you’re just the silliest boy,” she agreed. “But bruises or no bruises, I’m going to have you! If you must stay in bed, I’ll be your nurse. If you’re well, we’ll go on adventures. We’ll find those wonderful model engines you want to see, and rediscover old London and the places you want to explore!”

“And Martyn will play to me! I’ve found some fine old chorales I want to show him; and he’ll play Beethoven again. He plays beautifully, doesn’t he?”

Clare smiled. “I don’t think he could do anything really badly,” she admitted. “But he has not been playing lately.”

“There was something of Greig’s he played last time that I can’t quite remember. There’s a bit in the middle where I stick. I want him to play it again so that I can get it.”

“Can you always play anything you’ve heard?” Clare asked wonderingly; for she had no musical memory.

“Not the awfully difficult things,” Jim admitted. “But I can always remember an air I like, and I can generally remember the harmony. If you’ll really have me we’ll have some glorious music!”

A thrush was singing in the tree above them. Jim looked up appreciatively.

“He beats me! Isn’t he fine!”

“And the wind in the trees.... Listen!”

“Isn’t it jolly! I love it! One day Martyn and I are going to pay a visit to King Aeolus, and see the land of the winds. We’re going to see the great cave in the Aeolian Islands, and the chains that hold back the storms and the struggling furies. We’re going to see the home of the soft south winds. Then we’re going to have a peep at Aeolus in his lofty citadel, and

see how he uses his sceptre—how he soothes the angry blasts.”

“Martyn will want to try holding the sceptre! May I come too?”

“Of course! You and Martyn are one. If you were with us perhaps the King would notice us.”

“We might make a petition. O King Aeolus, the Father of the gods and the King of men had given you great power; will you let us watch you for a little while so that we may learn your secret.”

Jim’s laughing blue eyes met hers. “Would you pray—‘O King Aeolus, don’t let the winds spoil my roses’?”

“Would you?” she suggested—her eyes bright.

“I think,” he said simply, “the Father of the gods and the King of men knows best. We should only make a mess of things!”

He was quiet for a moment, then as he shifted his position he gave a low whistle. Clare got up from her seat, turned back the light rug that was over his feet, and gently eased the position of his damaged ankle.

“Thanks,” he said gratefully. “You do things without fussing. I shall love staying with you.... Here’s Wilf!”

Clare raised her head as she finished readjusting the loosened bandage, and her eyes met Jim’s brother’s. She held out her hand with a friendly greeting. Wilfred’s story was written clearly—for the sympathetic to read; a record of bitterness that was spoiling a life that might have been beautiful—that would have been beautiful if Wilfred had had half the courage of his brother.

“Well, old chap,” he said, turning to Jim, “foot better?”

“Oh, yes—heaps. Isn’t the book lovely!”

“Give me time, I’ve hardly got into it yet!”

“You’ve got it with you?”

Wilfred held up the copy that Jim had given him, without looking at Clare.

“I’m going along by the river. If I find I can breathe there, perhaps I’ll be able to get on with it.”

He put it back in his pocket, then turned to Clare.

“Make the most of the sunshine,” he suggested.

“I always do,” she responded.

“And you don’t mind the storms?”

“We keep a special stock of smiles and umbrellas for the wet days,” she said cheerfully, “and we’re always on the look-out for rainbows—aren’t we, Jim?”

“Which means that the storm has never yet demolished your refuge!”

“Our optimism isn’t quite as shallow as that,” she protested, looking at the boy lying prisoner on the chair.

Wilfred flushed. “I beg your pardon,” he said quietly. Then he turned and left them.

Jim’s eyes followed him, dark with thought. His affection for his brother was of a rare quality for a boy’s, for it held a wealth of tender pity and sympathetic understanding. Jim knew that Wilfred was weak—but how lovable he was. He knew that he was letting life conquer him; but Jim’s faith said—only for a little while. Soon he would rouse himself, and then he would surely win again.

With sensitive tact Jim hid his thoughts from his brother, and Wilfred never knew how much those clear blue eyes saw;

he never dreamed of the plans Jim's bright brain made to recover his brother's joy.

Clare had learned some of these things. She saw the shadow of them in Jim's eyes as they followed Wilfred's loose figure to the beginning of the drive. Then Jim turned and picked up the book again.

"Isn't it fine!" he repeated, as the two turned over the pages together. "Martyn is a most wonderful man, isn't he?"

Clare smiled into the boy's bright eyes, as her heart gave ready assent. Yet Wilfred—

Wilfred passed through the gate. He followed the road for a short distance, then took to the path through the woods. He followed its winding, over mounds of earth, across great uncovered roots, through tangled growth, until he reached an open clearing; then he threw himself down on the grassy slope, and looked moodily across the river, towards the willows that grew on the far bank, and spread their shadows over the sparkling water—unaware that he was not alone. A plain, gray-eyed girl sat curled up among the branches of a giant oak just above him. Gwenith Grattan was tired of being with people, tired of talking, most tired of suitors who were not lovers; so she had taken refuge in the oak. She watched Wilfred from the shelter of the green leaves, but she did not move.

For a little while he lay with his head on his arm, his eyes on the water, brooding. He was wasting himself, and he knew it; but he would not own that it is a cowardly thing to make one's own life poor, and to shadow others' lives, even among the wreck of a supreme affection. He blamed Martyn—Fate—Circumstance; never Wilfred Cavendish.

The girl in the oak tree watched him. She was not plain then.

Presently he drew the book from his pocket and opened it. Having begun to read he had to go on; yet every page brought wounding. How Martyn could love, Wilfred never knew more surely than now, as he read those glowing pages. How Martyn could hate, Wilfred had never felt more bitterly than as he read his book that ignored that primal passion. He had pictured Martyn at the top—strong, secure, and successful, beyond the reach of wounding, and he had longed with all the bitterness of impotence to wound. Martyn's withdrawal of himself had left Wilfred bankrupt, for he had no reserves, and he wanted to make Martyn pay.

The gray eyes still watched him from the shelter of the oak, while Gwenith's own book lay unopened in her lap.

After what seemed to the girl a long time Wilfred closed his book, leaving it on the grass beside him. In spite of his will, its spirit had for a little while dominated him. He had seen life strong and splendid, and dreamed that it might be his. For a few moments at least he was realizing that no circumstances can conquer the man who refuses to accept defeat.

He raised his head and looked across the river. The sun was hidden by a passing cloud. The sparkling water had become steely grey, light only by contrast with the darker reaches across which the willows cast their shade. The air grew suddenly colder. He shivered involuntarily.

The girl in the oak shivered too, in sympathy. She looked beyond him, her senses more alert than his. Then her face changed.



There was a sound of crackling twigs on the bank near-by. Wilfred raised his head. His thoughts of splendor and of conquest died. A man with fishing tackle was coming towards him, his eyes on the river. As Wilfred looked he turned; and the lad's eyes met Martyn's once more, and they were as the eyes of a stranger.

Between them was *Fellow Farers*, the book that breathed health and healing; that gave strength for weakness, courage for fear. In the eyes of the man who had written it was a cool indifference that poisoned. Martyn glanced at the closed volume then back to the gloomy face above it. He gave a short mocking laugh as he passed on, without further sign of recognition.

For a moment Wilfred looked after the tall figure, his pulses throbbing; then he sprang to his feet and made his way to the shelter of the wood. He threw himself down again in its seclusion, for he was trembling so that he could hardly stand.

His eyes were dry, but hard sobs shook him, as he lay with his face hidden on his arm, trying to shut out the sight of a glance that maddened, and the echo of a low laugh that mocked.

When he rose to his feet at last there was an angry light in his burning eyes.

“One day,” he vowed to himself, “he shall be hurt too. One day he shall suffer as he makes others suffer. But now—” he laughed, and in that laugh there was no likeness of the boy who had been a happy hero-worshipper—“ ‘Let him drink and remember his misery no more.’ That’s Scripture. We’ll try it—and everything else be damned.”

He went back to Jim, and “to remember no more” alone. The gray-eyed girl had climbed down from the oak, and had

gone away unnoticed; for although she was so rich, Wilfred wanted nothing that she could give.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *GOD'S GLOW-WORMS*

**A**FTER his short holiday Martyn worked harder than ever, but in new ways that separated him from Clare. They had been on the sunny heights together; now Martyn was exploring the depths; he did not want Clare to accompany him there. The ugly things of darkness were not for the woman he loved.

He saw less of his friends as he became more absorbed in his work. He would find them again when this next book was finished. Tom Foster still called to see him, but he did not stay so long. Since he had met Gavin Ogilvie, he was becoming more independent. He had found that the Scotsman had a secret he needed; although Foster had not yet made it his own, the search was holding him.

Gavin's influence over Foster made Clare wonder. Martyn had told her he was a "healer." One day when he waited in the garden, while she gathered her most sweetly perfumed briar roses for her blind friends, she ventured to question him.

"You said that you were going to see a patient; do you heal them all?"

He smiled at the greatness of her faith.

"Not all—always—or at once," he admitted. "Pain seems to be sometimes as necessary for man as bread," he volunteered, sharing his own conviction. "Jesus, the greatest of all Healers, did not explain it away. He did not always remove it. Sometimes, He said, it had a mystic cause beyond any act of man."

Clare turned from the bank of roses, thinking of her friends.

“Blindness is too much for us to attempt to explain,” she admitted, as she filled her basket with the double pink blossoms and buds.

“No explanation of the reason could ever explain,” Gavin agreed. “The problem belongs to another realm.... There is a mysterious depth of beauty in vicarious suffering,” he added.

“But no man can ever take upon himself all the consequences of another’s act,” Clare suggested, as they went slowly towards the house together. “A man must always—sometime, somewhere—reap what he has sown.”

“Yet vicarious suffering remains,” persisted Gavin. “For instance, a man and woman may be so closely knit together, that every pang one suffers, and every pleasure one enjoys, is shared by the other. The man goes down into the depths, and the woman, who could remain on the heights alone, goes with him, and for a time, for both, the light of the stars is lost. But as the woman suffers with the man she loves—sharing his worst; so he may afterwards rejoice with her as they rise together, and he, in turn, shares her best.”

When Gavin left her, Clare set out to see her blind friends, her mind full of thoughts of Martyn.

She was not jealous of his interests, but she was tempted to be afraid. Everything Martyn did he did so thoroughly, and Clare feared his absorbed contemplation of squalor—squalor that can dull the clearest eyes to life’s rich splendors; squalor that can sometimes twist its scrutinizer’s brain. Gavin Ogilvie and Martyn Royce were both the active enemies of vice, but Martyn dwelt in thought on the ugly thing he wanted to

uproot; the mystic's thoughts centered round the beautiful thing he wanted to implant.

When Jim came to see them, for a few hours Martyn broke free, and grew young again with the boy.

“What a thing it is to be a child!” he exclaimed to Clare, half enviously. “A real child, who has not lost his angel; who has eyes to see good in everything, a heart to enjoy everything, and to love everything; with power to believe and to wonder and to dream.”

“Jim has never suffered, as some dreamers have suffered, at the hands of other boys,” said Clare thoughtfully. “Boys are not his enemies, as they were Shelley's. I think he must win them by his courage. Mrs. Painton told me he is very popular at school.”

“Jim has had enough of boys' friendship to make him a boy, but not enough to rob him of his childhood,” Martyn responded.

“He gets me hopelessly out of my depth,” Clare acknowledged. “He knows the history of every modern statesman, sportsman, explorer, and preacher. This morning we were discussing the latest Tariff Bill. He admitted that he didn't understand all about it, though he had read everything he could get on the subject. But his summing up was keen.... Now shall we have some music?”

They went into the drawing-room, where Jim was at the piano. They sat beside him, and he gave them some of the treasures he had found—bringing out the harmonies with the touch of a natural musician. Then he got up from the stool and Martyn took his place. As Martyn played Beethoven, Jim listened absorbed.

Clare had once confessed, "I don't even know what stars have risen or set!" New stars had risen for her since that sunny morning. Looking at the two she loved, a phrase of Browning's came to her mind "...my star. God's glow-worm.".... Then she too was caught by the great Master, and all her thoughts were turned to music.

"I wish Wilf were here," Jim observed presently, breaking the silence that followed.

Clare glanced at her husband as she silently echoed that wish.

"Do you?" he asked, carelessly improvising harmonies, and meeting Jim's look with a baffling smile. "Why?"

"He'd love it so. You haven't been to see us since just after he came home. That's ages ago!"

"But you know how busy I am," Martyn protested.

"You've always been busy. Wilf never sees you."

"Oh, yes, he does, old man. We often knock up against each other."

"Do you really?"

"Honest injun! We met only the other day, when you and my little lady were entertaining each other by the lake. You see I know all about your doings!"

"And Wilf never told me!"

Martyn smiled. "Why should he? One can't tell everything. Now for a good old drinking song: which shall it be?"

As his fingers crashed down on a chord, Clare crossed to the open window, wondering whether anyone would be able to discover Martyn's thoughts when he wanted to keep them to himself.

A few minutes later he was called away.

Jim swung round on the stool, and his bright eyes rested appreciatively on Clare. The June sunlight was making her radiant. Happiness had made her beautiful.

The boy crossed the room to her side. He put his arm round her waist and looked up into her eyes.

“I’m nearly as tall as you!” he said, stretching as high as he could. “I shall soon catch up to you, and then won’t you like having me to take you out when Martyn’s very busy! You know you look so ridiculously young. I’m going to look old; so in a few years time people won’t see much difference between us. Won’t that be jolly!”

Clare caught the hand that was round her waist, as her cheek brushed his thick sunny hair.

“Simply splendid! But I don’t want you to grow up too fast. You make a first-rate cavalier as you are.”

“But it’ll be better when I’ve got stand-up collars and longuns. I shall look as old as you then.”

“Is that what you call them?” asked Clare laughing, as she looked down at the shapely legs encased in stockings that were turned over below the short knickerbockers. “I like the ‘shortuns’ you know. I don’t think I could like anything else better.”

“But I want the longuns for going out with you. Martyn won’t mind, will he?”

“Martyn will be pleased.”

“I’m so glad you married him!”

“If you won’t tell anyone, I’ll tell you a great secret,” she said, bending her head so that her smiling eyes were on a level with his. “I’m glad too,” she whispered.

The door opened and Martyn entered—quickly, as usual.

“You’re not wanted!” called out Jim. “I was just hearing a lovely secret.”

Martyn promptly closed the door.

“My lad, make the most of your youth,” he said, crossing the room and putting his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “In ten years’ time, beware of the secrets of a beautiful woman!”

“You’d love to know this one,” teased Jim, his eyes dancing.

“Oh, no; I don’t care,” Martyn protested.

“Then I’ll have it all to myself! It’s lovely! Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Martyn’s eyes shone. He looked at Clare.

“Not at all,” he asserted. “It’s no fun learning what you already know.”

“You don’t know,” she told him.

“Jim was telling you how he loves you.”

“I couldn’t; and I said it was her secret.”

“She was telling you how she loves you!”

“No such luck! You’re wrong again!”

“She was asking you to run away with her, and keep her safe from her brutal husband.”

“Wait till I get my longuns!” threatened Jim. “But you’re all out.”

Martyn looked straight into the gay blue eyes.

“Well?” he demanded.

Jim blushed. He looked at Clare.

“May I?” he asked.

She nodded; then she rested her cheek again on the sunny hair, as she glanced up at her husband.



“It’s a great secret,” said Jim impressively, “but—don’t tell, will you? She’s glad she married you!”

Martyn’s eyes were very bright as they met Clare’s.

“Why, old man, have you only just found that out? I’ve known it for ages.”

Clare turned suddenly and gathered up the deep red petals that a full-bloom rose had scattered over the sill. Then she tossed them lightly over Martyn with a low, happy laugh.

“Ah, wasteful woman!” she murmured, as Jim helped her gather them up again.

## CHAPTER XX

### *BROTHERS*

JIM stood on the steps talking to Martyn while the chauffeur waited by the car. The boy was in no hurry to go.

“It’s been just lovely being here!” he said enthusiastically. “You’ll come and see us soon, won’t you?”

Martyn held out his hand. “Good-bye, old man. Take care of my little lady whatever you do.”

“Rather! And Reynolds will take her safely to Mr. Foster’s this evening,” promised Jim.

“And not too late mind!” pronounced Martyn. “She’s engaged for a walk with me.”

“I believe you’ve grown into a dragon; an awful, brutal dragon!”

“Come along, Jim,” laughed Clare. “Or will you stay another week?”

“Yes, please: may I?”

He ran lightly down the steps. “Now we’re going to have a lovely time all to ourselves!” he said, looking up at Martyn with twinkling eyes. “You’ll be quite out of it!”

“You’re riding for a fall, old man,” warned Martyn. “You’d better be careful.” He closed the door with a bang. “I’ll meet you outside Tom’s,” he added to Clare. “You won’t forget, will you?”

Then the car started, and Jim pressed Clare’s arm in the exuberance of his spirits, as Martyn’s cheery “Good-bye” rang after them.

“Painton likes to talk about heaven, but I’m not in any hurry for it,” the boy volunteered, as, after a long, bright, breezy drive they turned in at the gates of his home. “It’s sure to be all right, of course, but this world’s so jolly... Now I’m going to pretend I’m Martyn. I told Painton we’d have tea on the terrace.”

He put his hand through Clare’s arm, and led her past the bright sundial garden to the broad terrace that stretched the length of the low red-bricked house.

“I told La Belle I wanted some of those cakes with pink cream. I hope you like them.”

“I should think I do!—They’re delicious. How nice of you to arrange everything.”

“You see, I meant to have you, so I told Painton to do his very best. I hope he’s got the raspberries and cream.... Hullo Fritz, did I forget you? I’m a brute.” For the next minute the excited barks of the old black poodle drowned every other sound. Then Jim quieted him and brought him to shake hands with Clare.

“Isn’t it jolly having it all to ourselves,” he said boyishly, as Painton, having appeared, been greeted, and finally having lit the lamp under the silver kettle, silently retired. “I’ll see dear old La Belle afterwards. Now I’m going to wait on you. You’ll pour out, won’t you?”

“I do for Martyn,” agreed Clare, smiling; and she put milk into the cups.

Jim moved lightly about, handing sandwiches and scones and cakes. It was lovely to entertain Clare. It was lovely, too, to be free from pain. In such freedom Jim’s spirits became exuberant.

At last he sat down beside his guest, and began his tea.

“It’s bitter!” he exclaimed, making a wry face as he stopped after the first sip.

“Martyn doesn’t take sugar,” laughed Clare, “and I thought that you—”

“But I like things sweet. I think now I’ve got you I’ll be just myself.”

“Two then?”

“Three please. Thank you. And one for Fritz.”

Sandwiches and cakes and fruit disappeared while the two entertained each other with laugh and story and reminiscence. As Jim put down his empty cup for the third time his brother came round the house from the sundial garden.

“Hullo, Wilf!” called out Jim. “I didn’t know you were home. Come and have tea with us. We haven’t finished the raspberries.”

Wilfred was wearing an old blazer, and as he came along the terrace he looked at his hands apologetically.

“I didn’t know Mrs. Royce was here. I’m afraid I’m not presentable; I’ve been carpentering. If you’ll excuse me—”

After a few minutes he returned, well-groomed, and joined them by the table. “Yes, I’ll have a cup of tea, thanks,” he said as he shook hands limply. “No, nothing to eat, Jim.”

He sank into a low chair and stretched out his long legs. Painton brought fresh tea, and Clare poured it out.

“Have you been working in the sun-house?” Jim asked eagerly. “Wilf has bought me the jolliest place,” he explained to Clare, “where I can be if I crock up again.”

“I’ve put up the shelves you wanted,” Wilfred said in his slow way; “and I’ve fixed a table against the wall, so that you

can put it up or down as you like.” Clare missed life in his voice. What a pity to live in the world half dead!

“You’re a trump!” cried Jim. “You’ve been busy.”

“Fairly. I think you’ll like it.”

“Rather! Any more chicks?”

“Twenty out this week.”

“Jolly good. And is Columbine’s leg all right?”

“Presumably. She kicked over the pail when Bob was milking her this morning, Painton told me.”

Jim laughed. “I wish I could have been on Wilf’s farm,” he said, turning to Clare. “All sorts of interesting things happened there. Wilf, will you show the princess some of your pictures?”

Wilfred looked at Clare doubtfully. “You mustn’t bore Mrs. Royce,” he expostulated.

“But I couldn’t be bored,” declared Clare, “I’m ever so interested.”

“I have a few here,” Wilfred said, putting down his cup with a hand that was not quite steady, and taking a leather case from one of his pockets. He handed a small photograph to Clare and Jim came and stood beside her—Fritz against his knee.

“That was my shack,” Wilfred volunteered, rousing himself. “Delightful in summer. Very lonely in winter, when we were snowed up, and even the top of the stove froze.”

“You have pictured it at its best then,” said Clare appreciatively. “It looks ideal.”

“It was—in some ways. The surroundings were beautiful. Here is one view of the garden.” He drew his chair a little nearer Clare’s. “I wanted to take one of my finest cherry tree

when it was a mass of white, but I felt that the camera would never do it justice.”

“I can imagine it.... And is this a snap of your flock?”

“I had only a few sheep, but I knew them all, and they knew me.”

“They used to come and rub their noses in his hand to see if he had anything for them,” explained Jim. “They weren’t ‘silly sheep,’ were they, Wilf?”

For the first time Clare saw Wilfred smile, and she realized how attractive he might be if only he would regain his freedom.

“They were allowed to go anywhere they liked on my land,” he explained, responding to Jim’s spell; “but the silly creatures often took it into their heads that the grass in my neighbor’s field was much nicer than in mine. They were intelligent enough—yes, Jim, I admit it—to know when they were out of bounds. I had only to call ‘Billy!’—my collie—and they came scampering home of their own accord.”

“Wilf had to be vet as well as farmer,” said Jim proudly.

“Oh well, several of the animals got ill during the winter, and there was no one else available. A little knowledge is fascinating,” he explained with a short laugh.

“And can be made to go a long way at a stretch,” agreed Clare, as she accepted another photo. “What a bonny lot of chicks! I should think you had very little time left for growing flowers.”

“My garden was a complete failure the first year, but wasn’t so bad afterwards. I was more keen on my live-stock though. I tried to evolve a new race of chickens. Developing

hybrid flowers is nothing to that. I wanted to breed hens that would lay over two hundred eggs a year.”

“And someone suggested he was going in for black magic,” laughed Jim; “the sort of thing that destroyed that old continent—what’s its name? Atlantis.”

“Since then I have seen hens in shows that have, according to the catalogues, exceeded my humble ambitions,” Wilfred said, returning the pictures to his pocket. “Would you care to come and see the sun-house?” he suggested rather bashfully.

Clare rose at once. “I was wanting to,” she admitted.

The three went up the terrace and through the sundial garden, accompanied by Fritz: Clare conscious of the drooping shoulders and melancholy eyes of the lad who had been Martyn’s friend; Wilfred feeling the charm of Martyn’s wife, and wondering bitterly why Martyn had not met her first.

They came to the revolving sun-house in the midst of a garden of hollyhocks, larkspurs, phlox, canterbury bells, shirley poppies, and a wealth of blue delphiniums. Just before the little house stood two tubs of hydrangeas.

“You’re my Gardener Bower-bird,” cried Jim, beaming on his brother. “Do you know that quaint old fellow of New Guinea?” he asked Clare. “He used to build his nest and then make a garden in front of it. Every morning he left a fresh offering at the door for his mate. Wasn’t it sporting of him?”

“You have to have the offering in tubs,” Wilfred said, brightening. “I can’t transplant things in bloom.”

“You give me everything I want. Oh, this table is topping!”

“Thanks.”

“You make me ashamed,” declared Clare. “I’m greedy, greedy, greedy for more. I want a white garden, and an herbal garden, and a primrose copse. But that I can’t have—the trees wouldn’t grow quickly enough. I go out to Coulsdon or Sanderstead for my primroses.... You have made a comfortable nook here,” she added, looking at Wilfred with a smile.

“The little chap needed it,” he explained quietly, as Jim whistled Fritz away from the birds, “and I like to make things.” As Clare prepared to go, he said with some hesitation—“Our carnations are not bad; will you take a few? Here, Jim—” And the two picked a large bunch of the deep-red flowers together.

As Clare sat in the car alone, speeding back to the man who would be waiting for her, the fragrant “Clove Gillyflowers” in her hand, she thought of the two she had left: Jim, bright, lovable, wonderfully courageous, finding life good in spite of his suffering; Wilfred, handsome, lovable also, but weak and faint-hearted, finding life evil in spite of his health.

Clare felt a deep sympathy for him. To have had Martyn for a friend and then to have lost him! Clare who had lost so much had never wholly lost her courage, but if she lost Martyn as Wilfred had done, would her courage hold? Her thoughts went on to the man who waited for her, and her eyes grew bright with tears.



## CHAPTER XXI

### *SHADOWS*

“FAIRLY punctual,” Martyn remarked, as Reynolds brought the car to a standstill outside Tom Foster’s flat where he had been going through some papers belonging to the journalist. He handed Clare out, put a coin in the chauffeur’s palm, and as the car turned away captured Clare’s arm impetuously with the pressure of a lover.

“Do you feel up to a good walk? I’ve been working as hard as a dozen Prime Ministers.”

“I could walk all night,” Clare responded happily. “What have you been doing?”

“We’ll get away from this noise; then we can talk.”

They turned from the main road, and in a few minutes reached a lane that still held a memory of the country, though, near-by, houses were rapidly covering the green, and shutting out the broad reaches of the sky.

Around them hung the fragrance of new-mown hay, and above the shadowed lane floated fleecy rosy clouds, still flushed from the farewell of the July sunset. Clare breathed in the fragrance and the beauty, but Martyn was thinking of other things, and very soon he drew her thoughts to his. In the stillness of the deepening twilight, while the last cloud yielded its rosy light, and the first stars came palely into the blue, he spoke of his work; he talked of his investigations, as he had never talked to Clare before. With a strange insensibility he took the woman he loved into a world that loomed dark and dread.

He was full of his own and his borrowed experiences—experiences he was using in his latest book. He was weaving his material from others' lives; burning his imagination with others' thoughts—lives and thoughts that were alien to the woman who had walked with him in Eden. It was not that Clare had shut her mind against ugly facts. Her experience of life had been limited, but her studies had been broad. She had looked at social problems honestly, but she had looked at them with other eyes than Martyn's. Now Martyn talked vividly of men and women who would not have understood her language; whose thoughts and loves could not have contracted the life that she shared with her husband, or the dreams that she shared with Jim.

Martyn had been out to find ugly things—vile things; and he had found them. He would picture them for others without disguise, that they, seeing as he saw, might hate as he hated, and so decree that they should be no more.

But Clare saw his hate colored by a tremendous interest, and his interest firing anew a sardonic imagination. She knew that such interest and imagination can sometimes disturb the balance of judgment, and distort the clearest vision.

He spoke lightly of things that made Clare's heart ache; things he would have sedulously kept from her a few months before. As she followed him into dark places she suffered in a way that he never dreamed; but she did not stop him, for he had been there before without her, and he would go again without her unless she could follow to atone. She thought of his unforgettable story, as she looked up to the clear night sky. Did Martyn still believe that the Divine was immanent in all? Could he now find His thought in a dew-drop—the imprint of His fingers in the rose?

“That was a horrid story to tell you!” he said, pulling himself up sharply. “I don’t know what made me do it. But it’s the sort of thing that’s as common as pence.”

For a moment Clare hid her face in the fragrant carnations she was carrying; they breathed of another world. Then she looked up at him.

“It was beastly,” she admitted. “But it can’t hurt me to know it more than it hurts you. You’re a fine writer, Martyn; but I wish you weren’t taking bounders for your copy.”

He laughed lightly. “Oh, they’re not all so bad. Still, human nature seems damnably feeble. But I ought not to talk to you about these things.”

“Why not, if you think about them?” she said steadily. “Only, Martyn, human nature isn’t all like that.”

“Isn’t all vile? Of course it isn’t. Let’s forget that side for a bit. But”—he laughed at the memory of his story, and the laugh stabbed her anew—“that fool got no more than he deserved!”

“Let’s forget him,” she said, lightly brushing the flowers across his face and pressing his hand against her side.

“Yes; let’s forget him,” he agreed, taking her hand in his.

They had reached the top of the hill, and the end of a second lane that opened on to the common. Clare stood still, and Martyn paused and looked with her beyond the low hawthorn bushes and the shallow lamp-lit pond to the luminous northern sky. In a lake of pale green not far above the horizon Capella blazed vividly white, solitary and beautiful.

“‘The Traveller’s Friend,’ ” said Martyn, catching her quick delight. “The star that has a way of shining and of

getting disentangled from a winter cloud when all the rest are hidden.”

“How beautiful! Do you see, it is tinged with red?”

“It is one of the most beautiful of all the stars; yet its glory is fading.”

“But it will last bright for ages and ages.”

“It is going away from us at about the rate of fifteen miles a second,” he said, looking at her with a smile.

“Isn’t it great,” she breathed. “I just love the wonder of things!”

Martyn still looked at her with a smile in his eyes—a smile half hidden by the summer night. Suddenly the sound of voices turned their attention. The smile faded; Clare’s joy in the stars was forgotten.

A man and woman were walking slowly along the path that fringed the common. The woman seemed to be expostulating with her companion. Resentment had sharpened her voice and made it penetrating, but in a moment the man’s voice, loud and angry, drowned it. Clare could not hear what he said, but her cheeks flushed with hot indignation at the sound of his abuse.

At the same moment she felt the atmosphere become dangerously electric. Martyn put his hand sharply on her arm and drew her aside from the path, as the man and woman came on towards the light of the solitary lamp.

“Damn the brute!” he ejaculated wrathfully. He turned to Clare. “Wait here!” he said imperiously; and left her without ceremony.

Before Martyn could reach him, the bully had turned and disappeared into the shadows. To Clare’s surprise her

husband strode up to the woman and stopped; and she had a strange excited consciousness that the bully had gone only just in time; in another moment, despite law and order and police, Clare felt he would have been in the pond.

Her heart beat quickly, but she did not move. Martyn was talking to the woman, who was becoming hysterical. She began to answer through sobs. Martyn stopped her. His voice was low and emphatic. The woman broke in again.

“We can discuss that later,” Clare heard Martyn say curtly; then he came back to her without comment.

“I’m sorry our walk is spoiled,” he said briefly. “We must go down to the road and get a taxi.”

He turned to the woman who had followed him. “We’ll get a taxi. No—don’t talk now. It’s no time for explanations.”

The woman looked at Clare, and again Martyn spoke harshly. “Not now!” he said; and the three went on in silence.

After some delay they found a taxi. Martyn put them into it, and followed in a grim silence. Clare looked at the woman sympathetically. She decided that she was a lady. She must have been handsome and self-reliant once; now she was faded and worn. What wonder? The man had been such a brute! There was something very pitiful in the sight of that broken strength. Clare leaned forward and put her hand on the trembling knee.

“Don’t bother about anything,” she said gently. “We’ll see you safely home.”

Martyn’s face did not lose its hardness. “She’ll be all right!” he said curtly. “I’ll take you back first.”

The woman looked at Clare, and then at Martyn.

“Won’t you—” she began. But he stopped her.

“No!” he said shortly, and her lip quivered again.

“You always were hard,” she said; and Martyn turned and let down the window with a jerk.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” he said as the taxi stopped at their door. Then he went up the steps with Clare.

He opened the door with his latch-key, led the way to his study and switched on the light. His face was hard. He did not meet Clare’s eyes.

“I shan’t be very long,” he said. “Wait up if you like—but not if you’re tired. You’d better have something to eat. I shan’t want anything.”

Then he left her; and Clare sat down in his chair, feeling suddenly desolate. As she sat there alone, with the vision of his hard eyes before her, she realized—“If Martyn ever lost control he would be terrific.” Then her faith added—“But he never would.”

Soon she roused herself, for he had said that he would not be long. She put her Gillyflowers in a tall glass vase, then went up to her room, took off her hat and coat, and came back to the study to wait.

She knew Martyn would be exhausted. She prepared some dainty sandwiches to tempt him, and coffee that should be ready in a moment after he came in....

The time seemed so long, as she waited—waited—alone.

At last she heard his key. She turned her head without getting up from her chair. Her heart was beating fast.

He came in. He crossed the room without greeting, and stood by the mantelpiece looking at her almost unseeingly.

Then she moved. She left her chair, and stood in front of him. She put her hands on his arms, then slowly passed them

over his shoulders until her fingers met as they were clasped round his neck. Her eyes looked into his. He must not keep her outside.

“What is it, Beloved?” she asked, her warm voice penetrating the ice of his reserve.

“That was my mother,” he answered hardly.

Suddenly—irrelevantly as it seemed, and mockingly—there flashed through Clare’s mind the words she had lately spoken so happily—

“I just love the wonder of things!”

## CHAPTER XXII

### *MOTHERS*

“**M**ARTYN,” said Clare a few days later, “I want you to take me to see your mother!”

Martyn carefully lit his cigarette, threw the match away, took the cigarette between his fingers, and looked at Clare speculatively.

“Do you!” was all he answered.

“I want it very much,” she said earnestly. “Will you?”

He pushed a chair forward. “Sit down and let us consider the question,” he said.

Clare sat down obediently, clasped her hands round her knee, and continued to study him as he went on smoking.

“Why do you want to go?” he demanded at length judicially.

“Because she is your mother,” she answered simply.

“I don’t consider that sufficient reason.”

He walked over to the window and flicked the cigarette ash on to the crimson rambler outside.

“And because she needs someone.”

Martyn returned to the hearthrug and his speculative regard of his wife.

“Ah! Well, I have been.”

“I know,” agreed Clare. “But, my dear man, you’re not a woman.”

“Thank heaven I’m not!” Then he returned to his judicial manner. “I don’t consider that reason enough either. You



must find a better one.”

Clare got up from her chair and joined him on the hearthrug. She put her hand through his arm. Her smile was very winning.

“If you would—if you could—if you please—be anthropological,” she suggested persuasively. “Do you think you could? Just a simple human being, instead of six feet odd of cold reason? It would be so much more comfortable.”

Martyn met her smiling eyes with the dawn of an answer in his own.

“Well, where is your case?” he demanded.

“Oh, Martyn, I want to go because she needs me.”

“By Jove, I believe you’re right!” he admitted, yielding suddenly. “She’s having a rough time! We can’t let her drown.”

“It must have been dreadful to live with such a man all these years.”

“It isn’t all these years,” he said fiercely. “That’s just the damnable part of it! She got rid of her second husband—divorced him, I believe—and got a worse in exchange. How she can have done it, I don’t know.... And after my father!” His tone was bitter. “It’s her third—and such a third! You can’t be surprised that I haven’t much opinion of humans in general.”

“Ah—don’t, Martyn.” She clasped her hands over his arm. “But you were right when you said that we can’t let her drown. Will you take me this afternoon?”

“Who is it rules?” he asked, throwing away his cigarette. “Go and put your hat on. But Clare, remember, I won’t have

you meeting that blackguard! If there's any chance of that you must never go again!"

"I shall certainly not try to meet him," promised Clare.

"Then get your hat, and I'll drive you."

Clare ran lightly upstairs, singing as she ran....

"You're very busy, aren't you, Martyn?" she suggested, as the groom sprang up to the back seat, and Kangaroo started forward—eager to be off.

"Very! What is it?" he asked, looking down at her questioningly.

"I was wondering if you would leave me with your mother for an hour or so. I could come home all right alone."

"Certainly!" he scoffed. "I'll drive, and you shall walk. I shall be delighted!"

"But there are buses, dear man," she reminded him. "I should like to stay; but I don't want to keep you from your work."

Martyn wrinkled his forehead in a worried frown as he guided the spirited thoroughbred through the crowded traffic of the crossroads. Clare watched his capable hands, as she had watched so often. She had many times heard Martyn called a reckless driver, but she thought she would feel no fear on the edge of a precipice, if he were holding the reins.

"It's quite obvious that you want to be rid of me," he said at length, amusement in his voice. "Kangaroo needs exercise. If I find the coast clear, I'll drive away, and send Collyer back later. Will that suit you?"

She pressed his arm lightly. "Perfectly," she agreed, her eyes still on those guiding hands....

They found Mrs. Mildmay lying on a worn plush-covered couch in an unhomelike sitting-room that bore the cheap stamp of “furnished apartments,” and that never saw the sun. Martyn crossed the room and shook hands, carefully polite. He might have been visiting a mere acquaintance.

“I have brought my wife to see you,” he said formally. “Clare, this is Mrs. Mildmay.”

Clare took the hand that was held out, and impulsively stooped and kissed the withered cheek—for was not this woman Martyn’s mother.

“I hope we haven’t disturbed you,” she said solicitously.

“No; I have had a sleep. I am pleased to see you.”

“Shall I tire you if I stay a little while?” Clare suggested, drawing the chair that Martyn had placed for her nearer to the couch.

“I should like you to stay,” responded Mrs. Mildmay. Then she looked at Martyn.

“You will be alone?” he asked pointedly.

“I shall be alone until eight o’clock.”

“I hope that you will soon be feeling better,” he remarked politely. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

His mother hesitated. Was there anything? Was there not so much? Yet there was nothing that she could ask.

“I think not, Martyn,” she said. “Aren’t you going to stay too?”

“I’m sorry I am unable. I am very busy. But my wife will stay a little while—if you would like her to.”

“That will be sweet of her,” Mrs. Mildmay said, looking at Clare. Then she turned again to Martyn. He was standing by the window—courteous, but oh, so cold—looking

indifferently at the woman who should have been so much to him.

“Don’t leave your work for me!” she said hardly; and Clare flushed hotly.

Without replying, Martyn came to Mrs. Mildmay’s side and held out his hand again. As he stood for a moment by the couch on which the faded woman lay, he appeared taller and more dominating than ever. Then he left them, and Clare suddenly knew that the room was drab and commonplace—that the atmosphere was heavy and close.

“He’s a hard man,” remarked Mrs. Mildmay, as the front door closed with a bang, “but I suppose at present you manage him.”

Clare looked towards the dingy window without answering. She must not quarrel with her husband’s mother, but already she was resenting her tone.

“His temper used to be terrible,” Mrs. Mildmay added, unconscious of Clare’s thoughts, “and he was often very unjust. I don’t suppose he’s changed much.”

Clare turned and looked at her gravely. “I am his wife, you know,” she reminded her.

“And I am his mother!” Mrs. Mildmay retorted. “But there’s no reason why either of us should imagine that he’s a saint! I suppose you don’t imagine him one, do you?” and she laughed shortly as she looked at Clare’s flushed cheeks.

“You don’t really expect me to tell you what I imagine, do you? You know—you must know—that I couldn’t.”

Again the once keen eyes studied Clare. “Why, my dear, I do believe it’s the miracle!” and the sharpness went out of the thin voice for a moment.

Clare returned her look steadily. "It is," she said quietly. "If you call it a miracle. The miracle that is as old as the stars." Then suddenly her voice changed. "Oh—he's so wonderful! I wish you knew." She stopped, remembering Martyn's story. Her cheeks burned. "Have you been ill?" she asked hurriedly. "I should so like to do something for you, if you will let me."

"Thank you, I haven't been ill just lately. I'm generally tired, though I used to be strong. You'll excuse my not getting up, won't you? I can't keep warm. This is such a dreadful climate, but one can't expect a landlady to light a fire this time of the year. This room never gets any sun."

Clare tucked the rug more closely round the shivering figure. "You must let me help you to bed as soon as you've had some tea," she said with decision.

"Thank you; I think I will."

Mrs. Mildmay glanced from Clare's dainty gown to the common furniture of the unprepossessing room.

"I have left a beautiful home abroad," she explained, pitifully apologetic. "I shall be glad to get back to it. I don't find England a pleasant place to live in now. But my husband had to come over on business, and these rooms were convenient.... I hate them!" she added suddenly.

She had not realized before how ugly they were. Now their pretentious vulgarity was blatant.

Clare wished that she could ask Martyn's mother to their own home, but there was her third husband—an insuperable obstacle.

"I'm afraid I'm in for an attack of influenza," Mrs. Mildmay continued. "I've had it several times, so I know the signs unfortunately. You're not afraid of infection?"

Clare smiled. “Oh, no! You needn’t be afraid of being alone if you’re ill. I will come over. All the same, I hope that you will be better tomorrow.”

“What about Martyn?”

“What do you mean?”

“Will he let you come?”

Clare smiled brightly. “Let me!” she echoed. “Of course!”

“Oh! So you feel free to do as you like—although you’ve married Martyn!”

Clare sensed the unhappiness of the woman who spoke so bitterly. “Yes, free still,” she said, simply. “But of course he would want me to come.”

A tiny maid, with big cap and apron, came in with tea; and while Mrs. Mildmay spoke to her—instructing her in the apparently difficult task of setting a cloth—Clare’s thoughts wandered unbidden to a scene her memory had treasured....

It was evening in Pam’s garden. The summer was nearly over, yet to Clare the world was newly beautiful because Martyn was in it. She sat alone with her dreams, while she began her “raiment of needlework” by the light of the setting sun. Then he had come to her, and all the splendour of the passing summer day had been concentrated into that wonderful moment.... What had he said to her, when she had quoted to him the “obey” of the marriage service?... “You will always be free.”

His voice echoed in her heart now. But she could have laughed at the futility of the promise. “Free!” Had she ever been free since that moment when—sympathetic and virile—his hand had closed over hers, and he had steadied her

trembling nerves by the power of his will, and had captured sleep for her from the unconquered country....

“I suppose Martyn is a rich man now,” his mother suggested, as Clare handed her a cup of tea. “I haven’t heard from him for years, but I’ve seen a good deal about him in the papers since I’ve been in England. He must be making heaps of money!”

“Yes, I suppose he is rich,” Clare agreed. “But I think he has always been that.”

“Always rich! My dear child, there were times when he went without food to buy books!”

“Yes, I know,” acknowledged Clare. “He told me. But I was thinking that he has always had precious possessions that money couldn’t buy.”

“You’re a dreamer—evidently. I don’t think Martyn ought to have chosen a wife who dreamed.”

Clare flushed.

“I don’t mean that I think he could have done better,” Mrs. Mildmay went on, doubling over the clumsy piece of bread and butter on her plate. “I didn’t want to hurt you. But Martyn is so hard, and you feel things more than some, I can see.”

Clare was studying the “kiss” in her teacup. Suddenly she looked up. This woman had known so much about Martyn that she would never know, and yet—had she ever known him at all? Why had she never found his heart? She had suffered for him; she had carried him on her breast, and yet—she had never known him! Clare’s eyes were wistful.

“But he isn’t hard when you find his heart,” she said involuntarily.

“So few have ever found it—and they have had to pay. There was a girl once—”

Clare took Mrs. Mildmay’s empty cup. “I think you’d better not tell me,” she said quickly.

“My dear, you needn’t be afraid. It isn’t a scandal.”

“I knew that,” Clare said proudly. “I know Martyn!”

“How well she carries her head,” thought Mrs. Mildmay. “She has character.”... “Yes, thank you, I would like some more tea,” she said aloud; “I’m very thirsty. But I was going to tell you: there was a girl in the factory years ago whom Martyn took an interest in. I heard all about it from his uncle. She was superior to most there. Martyn got it into his head that she was different from others. Of course, they’re really all alike! I used to tell him so. It wasn’t my fault if he didn’t understand. He was very friendly with her. I think he really cared for her. I know he helped her in many ways. Then he found out—or thought he found out—that she wasn’t quite straight. He was furious! From what I heard, he was very unjust. He never gave the girl a chance. But if he hadn’t cared he wouldn’t have been so brutal.”

“I can understand that,” Clare admitted quietly. “But I do want to be friends with you, and I can’t if you keep criticising Martyn.... Don’t you think we could be friends?” she added engagingly.

Mrs. Mildmay looked at her with a touch of longing. She had little talent for friendship, but she found this girl rather lovable. She would like to see more of her, but she had never been used to curbing her tongue, and she did not feel ready to begin now.

“You’re still very much in love,” she observed, as she pushed away her empty cup. “If you will come and see me



sometimes, I'll try not to say anything to upset you."

Rather shyly Clare proffered the small parcel she had brought with her. "It is Martyn's latest," she explained. "I knew that if you had not read it yet you would like to have it." Then, as Mrs. Mildmay took *Fellow Farers* from its wrappings without enthusiasm, she added, "Martyn told me you had been in England only a very short time, so I thought perhaps you might not have seen it."

Martyn's mother turned the book over in her hands.

"No, I haven't seen it. A nice cover. I hear Martyn's been doing great things. I did read one or two of his books, but personally I like something lighter and less problematic."

She opened the book at the dedication. Her lips tightened, and Clare unwillingly remembered Martyn's phrase—"The stupidity of her jealousy."

"I suppose he never dedicated a book to his mother," she remarked; and again Clare reminded herself that this woman was not happy. "It was kind of you to think of bringing it to me," Mrs. Mildmay added. "I'll try and get through it sometime."

"I don't think you'll find it difficult," Clare said with a smile. "I know even a child who loves it. It's different from the other books."

"Oh, I expect I shall manage it. Now if you will be so kind, I will let you help me upstairs."

Clare rose at once. She could see that Mrs. Mildmay was far from well. Excitement had given her a semblance of strength, but as soon as she was left alone she would discover her weakness. Clare did what she could to make her comfortable, then, when at last she was settled, she stooped

and kissed her good-night; with a kiss that was of pity only. To have been Martyn's mother yet never to have known him! That, to Clare, was tragedy.

She went thoughtfully from the room, and out of the house, to where Kangaroo pawed the ground impatiently.

When she reached home, Martyn was away in a world of his imagination. His mother, and the man his thoughts loathed, were forgotten. Other problems were pressing hard upon him.

At last, after the gong had sounded a second time, he came back to his surroundings. He laid down his pen and turned round. Clare put aside the letter she was writing to Jim, and crossed over to him, as he held out his hands in greeting.

"My apologies," he said brightly. "I've been having such a wonderful time that I forgot dinner. I'll only keep you waiting a minute."

Clare watched him unostentatiously all through the well-served meal. He ate little; his thoughts were still with his book. He worked twice as quickly as most men, and when he had a book on hand, he worked far longer hours; now he was looking tired out. She wished that he would take more recreation.

Clare had never known anyone who seemed to her so vivid as her husband; so vital, so intensely interested. Martyn had the world in his heart: not as the evangelist—who carries with him the burden of the "unconverted"; not as the sensualist—who loves the world for what it can give; but as a worldling—keenly interested in his fellows—who could imagine no perfect heaven without news of the world outside. But now his world seemed to be draining him of his vitality.

At last, as they rose from the table, he shook off his abstraction and turned to her with a smile.

“Are you ready to be bored, lady mine?” he asked, slipping his arm round her as they returned to the study.

“Quite ready!” she agreed, smiling up at him. “You won’t look to see whether I go to sleep, will you?”

“You dare! I’m going to read you something thrilling. Let me get a smoke first.” He moved away from her. “Don’t make yourself too comfortable or you may be tempted. And if you doze—Now what do you want? The cushion? I thought so. Well, be happy if you can’t be good. That right?”

He seated himself in a straight-backed chair by the open French window and Clare settled on the big cushion at his feet, just outside.

Then he began to read.

Clare clasped hands round her knee and looked across the garden, where Lambert still was busy, though nature was at evensong. The homing sun had left the southern sky with tender blues and greens, and thrown long shadows across the broad lawn below. A trailing spray of jasmine touched Clare’s shoulder, as its starry flowers scented the evening air. A blackbird sang from the laburnum tree, and a clump of giant lilies gently swung their evening incense in gleaming trumpet-shaped censers, as they looked towards the west.

But Martyn was not at evensong—he was absorbed in what he had written, and very soon Clare was caught away, and swept along the channel of his thought by hurrying words that scorched. Even as she responded to their impetus the desire of an ancient visionary echoed in her heart:—“I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning the evil.”

Suddenly she turned and covered the page that he was reading.

“No Martyn—not that!”

He put his hand over hers with a short laugh. He was so engrossed in his theme that he did not understand her hurt. “Want to blue pencil it?” he suggested, amused.

Her eyes were steady. “Yes. Girls fail their lovers—sometimes. Wives fail their husbands—sometimes. But few mothers—” She met his look squarely—“Yes Martyn, I know; but I know, too, many a mother who holds an undying wistfulness in her brave eyes, because of the boy she bore, the boy she helped to make a man—and then lost. Be loyal to those.”

“I’m writing what I know,” he said shortly.

“Then write what you once knew! If you have put away your ideal of motherhood, at least don’t destroy it. Leave it—till it lives again.”

She leaned her head against his arm, and he could not see her face.

“Very well then,” he said at last. “I don’t agree—but as it’s your first criticism, I’ll cut that bit.” ...

When he again stopped reading Clare was silent for a little while; then she said:—

“Martyn, you fight; I want to fight too.”

“No!” he said with sudden fierceness. “You keep out of it.”

“Lady Alwyn was talking to me about her work the other day,” Clare went on quietly, “and she asked me—”

“No!” he said fiercely again, interrupting her. “Lady Alwyn goes in for all kinds of ventures. She’s always got some new scheme or some new religion on hand. I don’t

mind you going to one of her precious meetings if you want to but, Clare, I won't have you turning scavenger."

Clare rested her arms on his knee and looked at him.

"But you know—no one better—how the work needs doing; and Lady Alwyn is a genuine worker; she isn't a morbid investigator."

"I know," he agreed, in a tone of finality. "But you have no need to join her."

Clare did not answer. He caught her shoulder passionately.

"Promise me, Clare," he demanded.

"No, I won't promise, dear man, because I can't be sure what I may want to do. But I will promise that I'll never do anything of the sort without telling you first."

He dropped his hand and got up abruptly. As he paced the room restlessly, Clare remembered that his mother had tried to teach him—"They are all alike": yet he had set his wife so high. She sat still on the cushion watching him, with a very human pride.

"Martyn," she called softly at last.

He stopped. Then he came back and sat down beside her, and put his arm round her shoulders.

Outside, the blackbird had finished his song; the long shadows had blended into one; twilight had fallen.

"Don't you understand, little one?" he said, with rare gentleness. "You are so very precious."

Yes; wonderingly Clare understood. But she did not agree with the deduction. She remembered One, Who was His Father's well beloved, Who went down into hell—to save.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *MARTYN IS VERY TIRED*

WHILE the year drew on towards autumn Clare filled her days with deeds. After her first visit to the Bloomsbury apartment house she found that Mrs. Mildmay welcomed her gratefully, for she was very lonely in her illness. When she recovered it was not so easy to please her, and not only Clare but Martyn was continually irritated by unconscious reminders that “that bounder” was harassing his mother’s life.

Clare had not “turned scavenger,” but while Martyn was busy with his work she spent many afternoons at Lady Alwyn’s East End clinic, and dealt out foods and medicines to weary mothers, with an enthusiastic interest in both mothers and babies that made her a general favorite.

She worked in her garden amid the gay wealth of the late summer flowers; she gathered her lavender harvest and enjoyed with her friends the dahlias, and marigolds, and sunflowers, and tritomas, that were leading on to the autumn so gorgeously, and she planned with Lambert the garden-that-should-be.

And all the while Martyn was busier than ever. He was out more than usual. When he returned he wrote far into the night. At last Clare persuaded him to take a holiday—only a short one, for he promised that they should go abroad later, when the book was published; but for ten days they roamed by the sea and over the Downs together, and forgot the many problems that perplexed.

It was the time of harvest, but after weeks of sunlit calm, nature had roused herself to storm, and the harvest was delayed. Clare and Martyn fought their way along the sea front together; laughing together in delight of the battle, as they had laughed together when love was young, and sunlight lay on a golden shore and quiet sea.

There was neither gold nor quiet now. Long breakers rolled in from distant surf-strewn grey, and broke thundering on a pebbly beach. Giant waves dashed against chalk cliffs and, beaten back from their fastness, tossed their spray on to a grassy ridge above. Where the cliff rose higher, the broken waves surged and swelled around white rocks at its foot, until drawn back to meet the oncoming billow, dragging rattling pebbles in their wake.

Clare and Martyn watched the surging foaming sea as it tossed its broken waves about them. Their lips were salt with spray. Clare's curls lay damp on her forehead. The wind nearly swept her from her feet, but Martyn's strong arm steadied her. They laughed at the storm together. It was good to be alive.

They went home as the sunshine returned to the earth, and the harvest promised a near gathering. The nights grew chilly. The glory of the goldenrod faded. The brilliant foliage of the Virginian Creepers fell. Clare worked in her home and the clinic; and when Mrs. Mildmay again was ill she nursed her with all the tenderness she could command—because she was Martyn's mother. When she was well enough to be about once more, and Clare was free, Martyn's book was finished.

"I am going over to Greyfriars," he announced the next morning, coming into the little room where Clare was arranging her flowers.

“Then you’ll be out to lunch?” she suggested, standing back to judge the effect of the long spray of Gloire de Dijon in the tall Oriental vase.

“Yes, and dinner too. I shan’t be back until tomorrow evening.”

Clare forgot her flowers. Martyn had not spent a night away from home since their marriage. She fought down the queer feeling that surprised her, and turned to him with a smile.

“I’ll put your things ready for you,” she said, without question.

“Thanks very much, if you will. Alwyn wants to see the book before the publishers have it. I promised to take the manuscript over. And there are several things we want to go into.”

“I see.”

He looked at her quizzically as she left her flowers and moved towards the door. “And what will you do with yourself?” he demanded, barring her way.

“I shall go out too!” she returned cheerfully.

He put his hands on her shoulders. “Where shall you go?” he demanded again.

She laughed happily. He still cared so much. She turned and took a half-double red rose and held it up to him.

“Do you know why some roses have such a beautiful fragrance, and some none at all, Martyn? This has a sweet-sad scent, of autumn and of spring.”

“Where shall you go?” he repeated.

Clare put the rose in his buttonhole.



“Mr. Ogilvie says that he always feels he must apologise to a flower when he picks it. But—there you are!”

“Confound Ogilvie! Well.”

“Oh, thou persistent latter-day tyrant! Lady Alwyn asked me to go to a meeting this evening—an interesting meeting at the Brahmin’s, with everything Eastern and silent. Then back to dinner with her—alone; and on to some other excitement—a concert in connection with one of her clubs, I think; and finally to stay the night at Queen Anne’s Gate.”

“I can’t remember that you ever mentioned this interesting program.”

Clare arranged his rose to her satisfaction before she explained.

“Fancying myself more indispensable as a wife than Lady Alwyn does, I didn’t think much about it. But the invitation fits in too well to ignore it now.”

“You make yourself happy very easily!”

“And why not! What arrangements could be more harmonious? You go to Lord Alwyn, and I befriend his wife. Now let me go to see what I can put ready for your comfort.”

But he held her close.

“You ought to be sorry to lose me!” he asserted.

“Ought I?” she questioned—her head on his shoulder. Then she freed herself. She slipped past him, out of the room, and upstairs.

When she gained the passage above she leaned over the banisters, her face mischievously bright. “Ought I?” she demanded again, looking down at him. “You want so much, dear man!” ...

Martyn reached Greyfriars in time for lunch, at which he found not only Lord Alwyn, but his daughter Vera, and her friend Gwenith Grattan. As he talked with his quiet scholarly host Martyn was conscious of the scrutiny of Gwen's gray eyes, and he could not be blind to their hostility.

"I believe that girl hates me," he thought, with an inward smile of amusement. "I wonder why?" Then he forgot her and her hatred, in the more interesting subjects to be considered.

After lunch the men went into the library together, to smoke and talk; at first, Martyn did the smoking, and Lord Alwyn—for once—did the talking. The manuscript of Martyn's book was between them, and Lord Alwyn began to enumerate the questions that he had been anxious to discuss. Martyn sat upright, smoking cigarettes, and listening with critical interest; marshalling his arguments ready for when his turn should come.

But his turn did not come that afternoon. Lord Alwyn's homily was interrupted by the entrance of the footman.

"A telephone call for Mr. Royce, my lord," he said. "It is someone who wants to speak to him particularly. He wouldn't give a name."

Martyn rose. "I'd better go," he said, "though I expect it's some confounded interviewer. They won't let me alone!" He followed the footman to the telephone room.

"Hullo!" he called, as the man closed the door.

"Is that you, Martyn?" came in answer; and Martyn was surprised to recognise his mother's thin voice.

"What do you want?" he asked bluntly.

“Clare called this morning and she told me where you had gone. I am in such difficulties.”

The voice from the other end of the wire sounded shaky and weak.

“Yes?” questioned Martyn uninvitingly.

“My husband has been away for ten days. I didn’t tell Clare, but I don’t know when he’ll be back.”

“Where is he?” demanded Martyn curtly.

“I don’t know,” came the unsteady answer.

“Well, what do you want me to do?”

“They’re worrying me for money.”

“Oh!”

“I’m sorry Martyn. But if you could let me have some.... I expect he’s been detained.... He never writes letters.... I can’t face that horrid woman’s insinuations any longer, and I can’t leave in debt.”

“Hold on a minute,” said Martyn. He frowned as he considered—the receiver in his hand. Then he spoke again.

“Here—don’t worry. I’ll come over.... No—it’s all right, I can manage it.... I’ll be with you somewhere about five.... Good-bye.”

Martyn went back to Lord Alwyn, and explained that it was necessary for him to go to town at once. Would he return that night? No, he was afraid he couldn’t manage that, but he would leave the manuscript, and come over in a day or two and fetch it.

“You will take care of it, won’t you?” he said in his brisk tones as they shook hands. “I have only one possession in the world more precious than that.”

As he stepped into the car, Gwenith and Vera came across the lawn to meet Wilfred Cavendish, who had just arrived. The girls had their tennis rackets. They called to Wilfred to come and have a game.

Martyn raised his hat; but his acknowledgment of the others left Wilfred outside. Martyn had too many interests to nurture bitterness and hate, but his interests had dulled his memory to many precious things, and had allowed a once beautiful friendship to be lost among the number of things despised. His independence was brutal to the one who could not forget. Wilfred flushed painfully as he lifted his hat in response to the courtesy that ignored him, and once again his pulses throbbed uncontrolled. Then he drew himself upright, and turned to Gwenith with a strange smile. That smile, that held no gleam of joy, made the girl unexpectedly demonstrative. She put her small hand through Wilfred's arm impulsively, with the brave gay word behind which a woman can sometimes hide her pain.

As the car sprang silently forward, Martyn gripped the wheel with a frown. "I'll come back tomorrow," he decided, with nervous irritability.

Then as the hedges and houses slipped swiftly by, his thoughts went out to Clare, and he remembered that she would not be at home. Perhaps he should have arranged to go back to Greyfriars after all. But Lord Alwyn would take care of his manuscript—and he was very tired....

He felt more tired when the interview with his mother was over. He had listened to the long drawn out story of her difficulties—interspersed with half-veiled criticisms of himself, and pathetic attempts at an explanation that this

monetary difficulty was only temporary, and that her husband's absence had a good and sufficient cause.

Martyn did his best. He tried to be just; but the woman who wants sympathy knows how unsatisfying justice can be. Martyn had no sympathy to give. He gave his mother the money that she needed, and more; then went out and visited poulterers and fruiterers, returning with dainties to help her back to strength.

Then he went home—to the home that seemed so empty without his wife. He sat in his study alone, and his thoughts went out hungrily to Clare. He did not realize that, strong though he was, he was really overworked and tired out.

He put down the paper he could not read, and crossed to the open window. The garden lay dark beneath a cloudy sky. The night-watching flowers were hidden among the shadows; only a faint perfume told of their vital delight. The wind drove back the clouds from the face of a star, and sent leaves fluttering down from the laden branches. Martyn stood looking out into the autumn night, over the garden where in springtime, the time of laburnum and may and lilac, his eyes had been held by a three-fold glory—the sunlight, the blossom, and a woman's hair.

It was nearly seven o'clock. Martyn's eyes had a far-away concentrated look. They were focussed beyond the garden, finding out a room, on the other side of London; a room that held his wife. He wanted her. With all his soul he wanted her. But she would not be back until tomorrow. His eyes were steady. He was seeing the woman he loved.

The clock struck the hour.

He turned back to his study alone.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *FREEDOM!*

IT seemed a long journey across London that autumn afternoon—an afternoon that, remote from the glory of the summertime, had borrowed darkness from the winter not yet due, yet to Clare it seemed worth while, for Lady Alwyn had said:—

“The Brahmin has a small meeting, just for an hour. We try to realize the inner meaning of our work in the Silence, and to renew our motive-power. It is very Eastern—very still. Will you come?”

For several weeks Clare had been daily encountering Mrs. Mildmay’s querulous discontent; her mind had been battling with the burden of Martyn’s problems. The invitation that promised silence was attractive. Since Martyn was at Lord Alwyn’s she would accept.

She chose to go by bus, for the life which it showed her. The bus carried her northward slowly, for after crossing the river it came into a sea of mist. Her eyes tried to pierce the murky grey, and she watched the shadowy people with growing interest.

Oh, the noise and squalor of the dreary streets! Martyn was working for clean living and beauty, for truth and the overthrow of hypocrisy. Lady Alwyn, and many like her, were working too, but the odds against them seemed tremendous. How could a clean thing come out of an unclean?

Down the quieter, drearier streets children were playing on the doorsteps—playing soldiers, as children played a hundred

years ago. A shadow darkened Clare's eyes. How could there be "war no more," while children played with the evil thing from their cradles, and knew it only through a lying glamour of romance? She seemed to hear the thunder of a vast apocalyptic battlefield—the cry of men and women wounded and dying.

She was going into the Silence—where power for victory was generated.

But Destiny waited for her on the road—unrecognized.

After several preliminary warnings the slow-going bus came to a standstill; its engine had broken down. Clare got out, less perturbed than most of the passengers, for she had allowed plenty of time, and she found her surroundings interesting. She had not gone far when her attention was arrested by the sight of two women standing in a peculiar attitude against a high brick wall.

Clare, who was always fearful of inquisitiveness, was tempted to pass, though she saw that something was wrong. She looked at the other women and children along the street, hesitated, then stopped.

The younger woman had got her companion on to the ground when Clare came up to them. The face of the old woman was white and drawn with pain, but she made no sound. Clare looked interrogatively at the other.

"I think she's broke her thigh," she volunteered. "I held her up as long as I could. They've gone for an ambulance. I don't know who she is, poor dear."

The old woman's hat was off. Her bony fingers clutched her worn purse and old string bag. She looked pitifully brave. Clare forgot her shyness. She knelt down on the damp pavement.

“Can I do anything for you?” she asked, as she took the thin hand in hers. “The ambulance will be here directly.”

The woman’s eyes opened dully. “I’m so cold,” she murmured.

Clare had on a long warm coat. For a second she hesitated, conscious of the collecting crowd, then she slipped it off, and put it over the prostrate figure.

The woman opened her eyes. “Thank you,” she said gratefully. Then again, looking at Clare—“How good you are, my dear—how good!”

Clare heard a voice behind her say, “Now that’s real kind,” and she blushed at the remembrance of her hesitation. She took the cold hands and warmed them in her own, trying to give the comfort of vitality and companionship to the woman who was silent in her pain.

The ambulance arrived. Swiftly and skilfully the men supported the broken limb with the splints that they had brought—then they lifted the old woman gently into the vehicle.

Clare learned their destination, and as she put her coat on, she called her good-bye, and a promise. “They will look after you well, I know. I will come and see you as soon as I can.” Then she went more quickly on her way.

When she reached her journey’s end, the mist had given place to dark. The air from the Heath met her, fresh and healing. She stopped for a moment to take deep breaths, and to look at the evening sky. Just above the clouds that lay along the eastern horizon, Mars was twinkling. Arcturus shone splendid and alone in the darkening west.



A clock chimed six as she knocked at the door. A little maid showed her upstairs, stepping quietly as in a sanctuary. Clare entered the upper room, and felt at home.

There was but a handful of people—as once long ago in an upper room where twelve men waited to meet their Lord. Beyond the window, the evening star shone splendid through the dark; within, the lights were dim, the atmosphere heavy with incense. Clare took the chair that was placed for her, her eyes drawn involuntarily towards the face of the man in the centre of the group—the Brahmin of whom she had heard much—the Indian Christian of whom wonderful tales were told. The slight figure was enveloped in a full, dark robe, over the upper edge of which the black hair fell from beneath the white turban. As Clare entered, the Brahmin's keen eyes flashed her a glance through the gloom, then the lids closed over them, and face and figure remained immovable.

A man, tall, soldierly, rose from his seat at the end of the room. He had a book in his hand and, bending his head towards the light of the single candle, he read, without introduction or preliminary, words that came to Clare with the strangeness of a new language.

*Atma! We promise Thee to obey Thy Will which is manifested in us, to honour Thee in all creatures, to hurt no living being intentionally, and to work for the Brotherhood and illumination of mankind until Thou at the end, takest them into Thy motherly Bosom.*

*Light and Peace to all beings in the All!*

The voice ceased. Somewhere outside, the whistle of a distant engine shrieked suddenly. The sound came nearer—passed, then died away. The impact of shunted trucks not far

below the window jarred through the silence. A minute later the quick, sharp step of a passer-by intruded into the stillness. Then the step, too, passed, and in the dim room silence held sway—a silence that seemed to Clare vibrant with power. The men and women sat motionless. The strong young face of the Indian was still—his mind concentrated on things unseen. The smoke of the incense ascended—as silent prayers rose to the Great Spirit overbrooding all.

At last the spirit of the silence laid its hand upon Clare, and her soul too became still.

Were not Martyn—with his burning pen—and these few men and women who were daring partnership with the Unseen, all fighting the same battle? The odds against them seemed tremendous, but Clare never doubted the strength of the forces of right. She joined her heart and will with those who prayed.

For half-an-hour there was silence. Then the Brahmin, quietly and simply, spoke.

Clare was listening to the address—deeply interested, wholly absorbed—when suddenly her attention was arrested. The Brahmin and his words grew indistinct. She became conscious only of Martyn. Without warning, and beyond dispute, there had come to her the realization that he wanted her. She looked at her watch with sudden impatience. How soon would the meeting be over? She longed to be free.

Her reason said—Martyn was at Greyfriars. She turned from reason. She knew.

The meeting ended. Lady Alwyn joined her.

“I’m so glad you came,” she said, in the hushed voice which the surroundings seemed to call for. “You are coming back with me?”

“Thank you, but I can’t,” Clare said at once. “I am very glad to have been here, but I must go home now. It was kind of you to ask me. No, I won’t wait for a lift, thank you. Perhaps you’ll let me visit the club another night. It has turned seven. I must go. Good-bye.”

She hardly noticed the Brahmin’s firm hand-clasp; she was unconscious of his keen glance. She wanted to be gone.

Arcturus had disappeared; low clouds were sailing across the sky, and the wind still blew across the Heath, as Clare left the house and started back across London, drawn by a force she called simply—love. She carried the spirit of the upper room with her, and as she went southward once more she saw—above the moving, thronging masses of men and women—

*...the traffic of Jacob’s ladder  
Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.*

Martyn sat alone in his study—for once too tired to work. He was trying to read a much-talked-of novel, but the book bored him; it was insufferably dull, and hatefully suggestive. He turned over the pages rapidly, the frown on his forehead deepening. At last he raised his arm and threw the volume impatiently across the room, where it lay, its back broken, amid the litter of the waste-paper basket it had overthrown. Then he leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes.

The door behind him opened quietly. He did not move, but in a moment he was wide awake. Then he felt two warm hands on his forehead, warm fingers covered his eyes, a strand of soft hair brushed his cheek. He caught the trespassing fingers in his own, and Clare laughed once more at the memory of his promise of freedom!

“Why didn’t you stay with Lady Alwyn?” he demanded, his eyes alight with triumph.

“Because you wanted me, dear man,” she said simply, as if there were no more to say.

“But you said I wanted too much,” he mocked.

“Inaccurate: I said so much,” she contradicted.

He drew her down on to the arm of his chair.

“Never too?” he questioned.

“Oh, you tyrant!... I want to see about some dinner. Mrs. Lambert will go gray if we become so topsy-turvy in our habits.”

“But tell me first,” he commanded, not letting her go.

She yielded to necessity. “I’ll tell you a story, if you won’t be fed.”

“Your stories lack force and symmetry!”

“Never mind!—Once—in the long ago—a man wooed a maid. And the man said—‘If you will marry me, you shall do as you like for ever and ever.’ The maid, being very inexperienced, believed him; so they were married. But after they were married the man said to the woman—‘You must like what I like and then what you like you may do.’ That worked beautifully for a while, because the woman was an angel. But the man thought it was his goodness that made the harmony and he grew conceited. One day he fetched her all across London—miles and miles—just because he wanted her, although she was going to have such a good time with a delightful lady who did good works and gave nice dinners! And when she came he asked politely—‘I never want too much, do I?’ But the angel—being an angel—could not tell a lie—”

“So she said—” he laughed.

“So she said—” she echoed.

She slipped away from him.

“So she said—‘Don’t you!’ ” she finished gaily, as she vanished through the doorway....

“Have you brought your book back?” she asked later—pouring out the coffee which she herself had prepared.

“No; I’ve left it with Alwyn,” he said, putting sugar into her cup.

“What are you going to do about it?”

“You and I will go over tomorrow and fetch it. Will that suit you, tyrannical one?”

“Yes,” she said, contentedly, “and I will carry it home.” ...

But they did not go together. After a restless night—in which dreams of the poor old woman with the broken thigh, the dark young Indian with the strange reputation, Martyn’s strong book, which she could not like, came together in a curious jumble—Clare woke, aching and feverish, to the realization that she at last had taken the sickness she had twice helped to conquer in Mrs. Mildmay, and that Martyn must do without her for several days to come.

While Martyn and Clare were happily planning in the study the things they would do on the morrow, Lord Alwyn was distractedly interviewing his family and servants; and Wilfred sat alone in his own room a mile away, his brooding eyes on a pile of burnt ashes lying at the bottom of the grate.

## CHAPTER XXV

### *A RETURN BLOW—AT LAST*

MARTYN was seated at the breakfast table alone. He had eaten ham and eggs mechanically. He continued to drink coffee feverishly, trying to realise the thing that had happened.

Before him, on the table, was a small cardboard box. By the side of it lay a creased sheet of paper—the title-page of his last book. The box itself contained only black and gray ashes—the remains of paper which had been burnt. Martyn's face was colorless—his eyes the gray of the ashes, with a glint of smouldering fire.

There was a tap at the door, and Alice entered, followed immediately by Lord Alwyn.

“I couldn't wait! I was told that you were alone. I—” The usually calm gentleman seemed to have lost his self-control.

“Sit down,” Martyn said in a frozen voice; and Alice closed the door.

“Your wife?” suggested Lord Alwyn, with a note of interrogation.

“My wife is not up. I'm afraid she has taken influenza.” Martyn pushed the box and the sheet of paper towards Lord Alwyn. “That spares you the trouble of preliminaries. Who did it?”

Lord Alwyn looked at the ashes; then he took up the crumpled paper.

“But it can't be!” he protested in a shaken voice. “It's too monstrous. Royce man, it can't be destroyed.”

“Looks damnably like it,” said Martyn grimly. “And before we’ve done, some cursed scoundrel will be pretty well destroyed too—or I’m much mistaken! Tell me about it.”

He moved from the table, took a cigarette from his case and lit it sharply.

“I know whatever happened it wasn’t your doings Alwyn,” he said, still in that frozen voice. “If it’s gone—it’s gone, and it’s no good fretting. Someone will pay certainly, but that needn’t concern you.” Fury burned in his eyes, otherwise he seemed far more controlled than Lord Alwyn.

“I want the story,” he said, standing upright by the mantelpiece and smoking hard. “Begin from the time I left. You saw the manuscript after that?”

“Yes,” said Lord Alwyn, trying to collect his thoughts.

“Tell me exactly what happened. Don’t leave anything out.”

Lord Alwyn was dragging at his collar as if he were choking.

“You remember young Cavendish came over just before you went,” he began. “The girls were playing tennis, but he didn’t seem inclined for a game, so I invited him to come and have a smoke.”

Martyn’s eyes were fixed on the other’s face, but he made no comment.

“We went back into the library together. Cavendish didn’t seem to want to talk, so I went on reading. It’s the strongest thing you’ve done Royce—and that’s saying a great deal!... Man, it can’t be destroyed!”

“Go on!” said Martyn bluntly.

“I read for about half-an-hour. Then Cavendish came over to the desk and spoke to me about it. I read one or two passages to him.”

“Doubtless he was interested!”

Lord Alwyn’s thoughts took a sudden turn.

“It’s all right,” Martyn said coldly. “Only I don’t think he’s very keen on my books. What did he say?”

“He didn’t say much about the book,” Lord Alwyn returned, with hesitation. “He told me he was going away, and asked me if Lady Alwyn or Vera would keep an eye on Jim.”

“Oh! Where’s he going?”

“He didn’t know. He said he wanted to get away from himself.”

“Rather hopeless! Well?”

“The girls came along while we were talking,” Lord Alwyn continued, his fingers still fidgeting with his collar. “Cavendish went off for a game with them and I continued reading.... It is a fine bit of work!”

“Was”—corrected Martyn hardly.

“No—no! It can’t have been destroyed,” repeated the other, without hope. “I began to make notes—absolutely absorbed. Where do you get your power? There are things in the book I was afraid might do harm. I was going to ask you to modify them.”

“And then?”

“Then Charles came to tell me that my steward was asking to see me. I closed the desk with the manuscript inside, and went to speak to him.”

“You’re sure you fastened it?”



“Absolutely!”

“You could swear it?” Martyn was not stopping to soften his manner.

“As far as one can swear to anything,” said Lord Alwyn, nervously drumming on the table-cloth with his fingers. “I’m positive I closed it. It locks itself. I was away about a quarter of an hour. There had been a serious accident in one of the cottages. I needn’t go into that. I felt that I ought to go over, but I went back to the library first. I tried the desk to make sure I had secured it, and then I fastened the window.”

“The French window that opens on to the garden?” Martyn suggested.

“Yes. Then I went off with Barnes. It was time for dinner when I returned, and it was nearly nine before I went into the library again. The desk was still locked, but when I opened it the manuscript had gone.”

Martyn left his place by the mantelpiece and began to walk up and down the room. Lord Alwyn took up the sheet of brown paper in which the cardboard box had been wrapped, and studied it.

“This is a woman’s writing,” he exclaimed, with conviction.

“That means nothing!” said Martyn curtly.

He was remembering an evening when he and Wilfred had amused themselves with the rather dangerous pastime of copying handwriting. Martyn could do it nearly perfectly; Wilfred had tried to emulate him.

“The postmark is indistinct,” Lord Alwyn continued, studying it. “It might be anything.”

“It doesn’t matter—it’s quite unnecessary to know it!”—and again Lord Alwyn looked at him questioningly.

“Tell me what you did next,” Martyn commanded.

“I talked to Charles first. I felt there must be some simple explanation. Honestly, Royce, I fancied for a few minutes that my brain must be going. Charles swore that no one had been in the room. It was hardly likely that anyone could have gone that way without being seen.”

“How about the window?”

“I had fastened that.”

“But before you fastened it?”

“Miss Grattan and Cavendish were playing tennis. It would have been quite impossible for anyone to have got in unnoticed.”

“Quite so. They were there when you went back to the room?”

“Yes, they were just finishing a set. I remember, because Gwenith called out to me that she had been badly beaten.”

“You had the key of the desk with you?”

“Yes, there is only one.”

“You have questioned the servants?”

“Yes. But Royce, what could they know about it? The whole thing’s a black mystery to me.”

“Ah! Were there—excuse me—any other guests?”

“No—only Gwenith. She is staying with Vera for a few days.”

“No one else to dinner?”

“Terrance was there, I believe.... Yes—he was. Cavendish went away after the game.”

Martyn paced the room restlessly for some moments. Lord Alwyn watched him nervously. "What were you getting for it, Royce?" he suggested at last.

Martyn looked at him for a moment uncomprehendingly. Then he gave a short laugh.

"Oh, you imagined I was thinking of the money, did you? I can't tell what that would have come to in the end—but certainly a very good sum. But I didn't happen to be thinking of that side of the question. I was just wondering how much would be left of—"

He drew himself up abruptly, fighting for his self-control; for he had a sudden vision of Jim's blue eyes, and the memory of his happy voice exclaiming—

"I wish Wilf were here.... He would love it so!"

Dare he defy the law which decrees that no man shall take vengeance on the guilty without wounding the innocent?

"If you don't mind I will come back with you," he said at last. "And, Alwyn, don't trouble to make any further investigations. I'm quite equal to running the blackguard to earth alone." He gave another short laugh. "I've lived through many things, and I shall live through this."

Lord Alwyn saw that he was nearly at the end of his self-control; but he did not realize the strain which had brought nearer its breaking point.

Martyn would not go up to see Clare. He rang the bell sharply.

"Mrs. Royce was sleeping," he said quickly, as Alice answered it. The girl looked at him in surprise. "Tell her, when she wakes, that I've gone to Greyfriars with Lord Alwyn. I shall be back some time this evening. And, Alice,

whatever you do, take good care of her. Let other things wait. Just see that Mrs. Royce has all she needs. Tell her I'm sorry I had to go."

Alice went down to the kitchen wondering.

"I can only say—I'm glad it wasn't me that upset him!" she remarked concisely to Mrs. Lambert....

Martyn and Lord Alwyn were both silent as the car took them swiftly back to Greyfriars. Martyn was reasoning, with a brain that burned, and Lord Alwyn was trying to convince himself against the conclusion of the relentless man at his side.

The two made pretence of lunching together, and during luncheon the silence was broken conventionally. They talked of matters of State—they discussed European affairs. Against Lord Alwyn's suggestion that the rapidly growing world commerce in ideas and ideals was preparing the way for international peace, Martyn contended hotly that the thoughts and actions of the nations betrayed a spirit of intolerant anarchy that would end in a great international war. It was so much simpler to talk of potential war between nations, than of an actual war between men.

But when they rose from the table Martyn returned to the personal problem.

"Don't forget, Alwyn, you leave this thing alone now. I can manage it. I'll have a stroll round the garden. Perhaps I shall see the girls. I should like to talk to them."

"Shall I send for them?" Lord Alwyn suggested.

"No, thanks. But you might find out whether that young Terrance is about, if you will."

Again Lord Alwyn looked at him doubtfully. "He was lunching with them, I believe," he said.

"Then I'll manage, if you leave me to it. You have your nap."

But it was not Terrance—the fresh-featured boy with the mop of red hair, who was openly courting Vera Tempest—whom Martyn wanted. He only required him as a magnet for Vera, that he might have Gwenith Grattan to himself.

Without delay Martyn got what he wanted, and Gwenith found herself walking along an avenue of sunflowers, alone with the man she disliked.

"We'll sit down," he decided, as they reached a seat, facing the sunflowers and the dark yew hedge. "I want to talk to you."

Martyn knew there was no need to beat about the bush with this girl of the clear gray eyes. He might be cautious with Lord Alwyn, but not with Miss Grattan. He would not try to disguise the fact that he meant to catechise her.

Gwenith looked at him defiantly. She knew that he had once been Wilfred's friend, and was now his enemy. She did not know the reason of the enmity; but she knew that it made Martyn Royce her enemy too.

"You played tennis with Cavendish yesterday afternoon?" he demanded, as soon as they were seated.

"Did I?" she inquired, with an aggravating drawl—quickly resenting his tone. "Well—now you suggest it—I believe I did."

Martyn was in no mood to be conciliatory.

"Singles?"

"Singles," she agreed.

“So you two were alone?”

“Quite, absolutely, and entirely, alone—on opposite sides of the net!”

“Miss Tempest didn’t play?”

“Miss Tempest did not play—tennis. I didn’t inquire what she was playing. I thought it more friendly not. Mr. Terrance might be able to tell you if you want to know.”

“Don’t fool, Miss Grattan!” Martyn said sharply.

Gwenith drew her small figure up indignantly. No one had ever spoken to her like that before. But she did not rise.

“You know very well what I’m driving at. I paid you the compliment of not pretending. Lord Alwyn was in the library when you started your game. You were playing on the court outside—”

“Rather far outside”—interpolated Gwenith.

“Quite near enough! Lord Alwyn was called away. He was out of the room about a quarter of an hour. He was talking to Barnes in the hall, so no one could have entered the library by the inner door without his knowing. Did you see anyone go in from the garden?”

“No, there was no one,” Gwenith said positively. Then she softened slightly. “I heard about it, of course,” she said quickly. “I’m awfully sorry! But why did you start hectoring me?”

“Thanks! I’m not wanting sympathy, Miss Grattan—only a few plain truths. You were playing all that time?”

“Yes.”

“And no one else was about?”

“No one else was about. I said so! The manuscript must have been taken afterwards—when we had gone indoors.

Lord Alwyn is sure of that, though he cannot understand how it could have been done.”

“Never mind theories! You were playing tennis with Cavendish. The game never stopped?”

“Not till it was finished!” she retorted.

“Which side of the net were you?”

She opened her lips to answer, then hesitated. In a flash she saw his thought.

“Oh—I hate you!” she burst out suddenly.

“Which side?” he repeated.

“Your insinuations are abominable!”

“Just so. Facts are sometimes! And how many times did Cavendish leave off to pick up balls?”

Gwenith looked at him with startled eyes. She remembered her impatience while Wilfred had dived among the rhododendrons below the library window for a ball that she had sent there; she remembered how she had run up the slope on the opposite side of the lawn for another ball that was missing, and how—when she returned—Wilfred was just emerging from the bushes. After that he had played recklessly, and she had been hopelessly beaten.

Martyn watched the girl mercilessly. He noted the startled expression in her eyes—he saw the colour mount her face. Then he saw—as a revelation—the light of that passion that can make the plainest woman beautiful. Had it been for anyone else, the man whose own life had been transfigured by love would have softened. But the next moment he saw defiance in her gray eyes, and he thought fiercely—

“This girl would perjure herself. She knows, and she will shield him.” He strangled his intrusive sympathy.

Gwenith rose. She felt that she was trembling, but her enemy should not see. Her small head was erect. Her dignity had returned.

“Perhaps you would like to interview Mr. Terrance,” she suggested calmly. “Shall we go and find him?”

“Thank you Miss Grattan,” said Martyn, as he too rose; “but you’ve told me all that I wanted to know.”

They walked back together; Gwenith in a defiantly sweet voice calling his attention to the spotted missel thrushes devouring the scarlet berries of a yew; Martyn in a grim silence that would yield to no pretence.

Suddenly she flashed round upon him again.

“You think you care for others more than for yourself!” she cried, in a low voice. “I know! And I know that you’ve helped many. But do you suppose that your superior charity will avail one jot against the crime of sending one soul to perdition?”

“Avail!” he echoed coldly. “Avail for what? I have never expected an account to my credit. But if you will consider, Miss Grattan, I think you will find that you have conceded a very damaging point.”

“I’ve never seen so many berries on the holly before,” the girl remarked, with a sudden return to her defiantly sweet manner. “I wonder if we shall have a hard winter.”

She felt as if her heart were breaking. She kept on talking that the wound might not be seen....

She smiled again when Vera joined her, anxious to tell her the latest witticisms of the red-haired boy. Gwenith felt that she had suddenly aged—she knew so much. What did Vera—with her pretty doll-face, and her absorbing interest in clothes



—know of love? What *did* she know? She was telling Gwenith, as they sat together on the grassy slope above the lawn: Gwenith—the girl who knew that it was not procurable with forty thousand a year.

“Val’s a nice boy,” Vera confided to her, dimpling. “Don’t you like him, Gwen?”

“Yes. He is—what you call him—a nice boy.”

“He’s awfully fond of me too!”

“That makes him nice I suppose!”

Vera carelessly prodded the turf with her daintily shod foot.

“Of course!” she laughed.

“And if he left off being fond of you?” suggested Gwenith, uncomfortably argumentative.

“He wouldn’t be nice!” decidedly.

“Do you imagine you’re in love?”

“As far as I ever want to be. It’s idiotic for a girl to let herself go so far that she can’t get back,”—and the nineteen-year-old, worldly wise daughter of the peeress who did good works, laughed lightly at the solemnity of her argumentative friend.

“You don’t know what love is,” pronounced Gwenith in a quiet voice, “or you’d never measure the distance.”

“Oh—rubbish! Every man is really an embodiment of conceit. If you know, you don’t get bruises. *I* don’t intend to get bruised anyway.”

“Are you ever going to love?”—and Gwenith turned solemn gray eyes on her companion.

“Why Gwen, I never expected sentiment from you! What do you know about it?”

“I learned something from my mother,” the girl said in quiet, everyday tones. “Hers is a romance.”

“How?” suggested Vera.

“She married Father when she was very young. I don’t think she was given much choice. He was a dear, of course, but even I knew he wasn’t the right sort for Mother. She was beautiful and idealistic and clever and all that, while he—dear old dad—was only a millionaire. I think it was really better for him to go. I don’t suppose he was very sorry. Then Mother met Sir Francis. He’s everything that Father wasn’t. They suit each other beautifully. They’re awfully happy. She must believe in love or she wouldn’t have given up her fortune to marry him.”

“Her willingness to be poor made *you* rich anyway,” said Vera with a laugh.

“You think so?”

Gwen had been talking to Martyn, and for a moment her voice unconsciously echoed his decisive tones. She clasped her arms round her knees which were drawn up near her chin.

“Can a plain girl be rich?” she inquired.

“It’s rubbish to call yourself plain,” said Vera charitably, serenely conscious of her own faultless complexion and regular features. “You’re only plain when you’re bored.”

“And at other times?”

“I’ve told you—yours is such a quaint little face, and your dear little snub nose is so contrary to your dignity that it’s sometimes ludicrously bewitching!”

Gwenith was thinking of other things.

“There’s someone I know,” she remarked, “who might imagine my mother’s willingness to be rich had made me poor.”

“Oh, tosh! But whom do you mean?”

“Someone who knows what love is.”

“Who?”

“Mrs. Royce!”

“Oh—I like her! But why do you say she knows?”

“She knows just the things you don’t know,” said Gwenith bluntly. “You think it love to enjoy the attention of a nice-looking boy who admires you. It isn’t even its cousin a hundred times removed! If you could find softness in a heart as hard as the nether millstone, and kindness among a muddled-up heap of brutality, and a soul that was hidden from everyone else under a hard dogmatic mentality; and if you could discover the divine spark in that soul when it had almost smouldered to ashes; and if—even when you couldn’t find those things—you could still believe in them—then you might say that you loved!”

Her voice had grown passionate. Vera looked at her in surprise.

“What a long sentence!” she gasped. “Were you thinking of Mr. Royce?”

“Perhaps. Anyway Mrs. Royce knows all these things. Do you imagine she’d think ‘there are plenty of others,’ if he failed her? Do you suppose she’d ever fail him? But of course you don’t know anything about it! Let’s hope your nice boy will keep nice, and never behave badly. You’re like Iva. She has what she wants, too. If she’d married Mr. Royce there would have been ructions! She may thank heaven your

brother's different.... I believe people are often given what they want—but of course they have to pay the price. You and Iva want perpetual sunshine, and you have it. But I—I have never felt the attractions of a Sahara.”

Gwenith's cuts usually missed her friend's feelings, because Vera seldom listened to the end of a paragraph.

“I suppose some women are needed for the men who fail,” Gwenith went on, musingly, her unseeing eyes on the Virginia Creeper that, later than Clare's, flamed over the Eastern Gables. “The men who are not always so fond of us; the men who are sometimes less than heroes.”

She unclasped her arms and turned to Vera, her eyes wistful. Vera had never known Gwenith emotional before.

“Don't you think, Vera, it must be rather a grand thing to be allowed to love a man who's weak enough to need you? To have the hand that he shall hold when he's struggling to his feet after a fall?”

Then she gave a sudden embarrassed laugh.

“But stick to your nice boy!” she exclaimed, “and—bless you both! I may have these thoughts because I'm plain. Oh, yes—I know I am—and so very rich; and when you're plain and rich there are so many difficulties in the way of marriage that you may theorize as much as you like.”

She rose to her feet. “Mrs. Royce is a darling,” she added irrelevantly. “She's just wonderful to love that man! I could never do it.”

As they went back to the house she remembered her conversation with the Brahmin at Queen Anne's Gate. Would Clare ever be great? Perhaps only great in loving. But that was why Gwenith loved her so.

“He’s so brutally hard,” she thought bitterly—and her face was sad. “Poor, poor old Wilf! If I could only run away with you! You do want mothering so very, very badly.”

## CHAPTER XXVI

### *SNOW-BOUND*

**W**ILFRED could not sleep. He had motored back from the city post-office, feverishly excited, and madly triumphant that at last he was able to hurt the man who had so hurt him. He was indifferent to possible consequences. He was too unstrung to consider the results of his action, or to realise what the loss of the book would mean to the man whom it had cost so much. It was with no thought of avoiding retribution that Wilfred determined to go away. It was from himself he wanted to flee; himself—and the thoughts that ravaged him.

He tossed feverishly on his bed, visions of Martyn's hard eyes haunting him; and memories of Martyn's old brotherly tones tearing his heart with longing. As soon as the day broke he would start. He would go on, and on, and on; until he had lost himself and the demons that tormented him!

Was there any place of refuge? As he turned restlessly from side to side, a sudden picture flashed upon his heated brain, the picture of a quiet Manse in a tiny Highland village far away. Mr. McKerrow, the minister, had settled there a year before Wilfred had gone abroad. Wilfred had spent a glorious month with him and his wife about six months after their marriage; and three years later the minister had taken a journey to the States, and had visited Wilfred—staying for a week with him in his lonely shack.

Wilfred could not feel that he had any claim upon the McKerrows' hospitality, yet he knew that they would give

him a welcome, for they were of the elect who entertain even fallen angels—undisguised.

That Highland Manse should be his destination. He would reach it somehow....

“You will leave an address, sir?” asked Painton, respectfully but anxiously, as he helped Wilfred into his big coat.

“Why?” asked Wilfred shortly. “I want no letters sent on!”

“But, sir—Master Jim will be anxious. He hasn’t been very well, sir.”

“He’ll be all right again directly. That ass Bently knocked his foot when he was fooling round. Look after him, won’t you, and if Bently comes again keep an eye on him.... I can’t give you an address—I’m not sure of one. I’m going up to Scotland—beyond Aberdeen. When I know where I’m staying, I’ll send a line.”

“You won’t forget, sir, will you?”

“Hang it all, man—why should I! Of course I’ll send.” Wilfred sprang into the car, and started off—hardly conscious of the slim white hand that waved from an upper window, or of the boyish voice that called:

“Good-bye, Wilf! Have a good time! And if you meet the Prime Minister tell him to buck up and get that Bill through—I want to read about something else.” ...

How long did the journey take? Was it hours?—or weeks?—or years? Wilfred was unconscious of time. Once or twice—or was it a hundred times?—he stopped to look for sleep in some strange place which he could not afterwards remember. Once or twice—or was it a hundred times?—he had to get more petrol for his car. Perhaps when he had got the petrol he

had some food—he could not remember. As he drove, he had no memory of Martyn, or the manuscript, or the thing that he had done. A terrible pain in his head made thought impossible. The only thing that he could see was the map of the road that he must follow, and the quiet Highland Manse that stood beckoning at the end.

That end was so far away—and so different from the beginning—that surely the memory of the beginning would be lost at the end. The only thing that he wanted was to forget. If the pain in his head would stop and give him peace and let him forget—then he would want nothing more.

As he drew nearer the goal of his journey—how long had he been travelling: a month—a year?—the air became much colder, and before he reached the village which was his destination he found that snow had fallen. He could not take the car along the last few miles, but he would not pause. The distant Manse had led him like a guiding light, and he must soon reach home.... He left his car at a garage in the small town, took his portmanteau in his hand, and started to tramp through the snow.

It was bright moonlight. He remembered the way well. There was no fear of his missing the road. Passion and hate and pain had left him. They would not be allowed to cross the threshold of the quiet Highland home. No—the pain in his head had not gone. But it would go soon.... What a wonderful world this was! His feet sank into the deep, soft snow; his progress was hindered.... But the moonlit snow had fallen upon his terrors and had buried them deep away. He would see them no more.... He gave thanks for the snow....

There was a sound of bells behind him, and a moment later a cheery voice called out:



“Want a lift, man?”

Wilfred turned and looked at the muffled-up figure, and the clean-shaven face below a warm close-fitting cap. He struggled for a memory.

“It’s Dr. Grant,” he said—when he found it. His tone held no note of greeting. He could not feel.

“Why—it’s Cavendish! Where are you bound for on such a night?”

“The Manse,” said Wilfred.

“Come along then; that’s where I’m going,” and Wilfred got into the sleigh.

“Do they expect you?” the doctor asked, tucking the rugs round his new companion. He gathered the reins in his hands, and the sleigh started off with a merry jingle of bells.

“They weren’t, but I wired from Aberdeen.”

“Then Mrs. McKerrow’ll be ready. Auch! it’s glad they’ll be to see you again.”

Wilfred looked straight before him without answering. Now that he had to make no further effort to drive or walk, he felt the pain in his head afresh. If only he could loosen that burning iron band! But the haven was near, and there it would surely drop off and leave him free....

They drove on through the snow—the sleigh bells jingling musically—through country that was lovely—yet unearthly. Presently they turned up a steep slope above the glen through which the burn falls and flows. Snow lay deep and untrodden in the hollows and on the slopes. The branches of the trees were bent beneath its weight.

“The snow has come early,” remarked the doctor, “and more is threatening. Funny if we get snowed up while you’re

here.”

“I should like it,” said Wilfred dully, “if the demons would keep outside.”

Dr. Grant looked at him searchingly, then he whipped up the horse to a gallop.

“Cold?” he suggested easily.

Wilfred shivered. “No.... I don’t know.... I think I’m hot.... I—don’t know.”

The door of the Manse was opened before the sleigh had come to a standstill, and the tall dark minister and his handsome wife were out in the snow ready to welcome the travellers. The warmth of their greeting seemed to penetrate the icy weight that had lain upon the boy’s heart. They took him in to the cosy room where a fire blazed cheerfully, and the doctor followed.

Wilfred began to talk rapidly.

“You didn’t mind my coming, did you? I won’t be any bother. But I wanted to ride and ride until I lost myself—but there had to be an end. I saw you at the end so I started to reach you.... I knew when I reached you it would be peace.... Oh, I’m all right—don’t worry; only it’s such a long time since I had any sleep.... How long? I don’t know. Weeks I think. I left Jim behind. You don’t know Jim, do you? But Painton will let me know if he wants me.... I must let Painton know where I am, when I have had some sleep.... I promised.... I don’t know why I promised, but he bothered me.... I’m talking a lot, aren’t I?... Yes, I’ll sit down thanks. This is heaven.... But I could be quiet if I liked, only I have had no one to talk to for so long, and it seems company. What’s that Doctor? Coffee? Am I thirsty? I haven’t noticed—perhaps I am. What is it? Thanks.”

Wilfred drained the glass Dr. Grant handed him, and sank back into the easy chair. Mrs. McKerrow looked at him anxiously.

“I think if I were you I should get straight to bed,” she suggested persuasively. “We were expecting you, and there’s a fire in your room. You’ve had a very long drive.”

“Yes—very long. I think I’ve been driving for years. But I didn’t trouble about speed limits. I believe I killed a dog. I was sorry—but I couldn’t stop. I was trying to get away from myself.... I know I killed some fowls, and heaps of rabbits.... I hate the bumps.... But the things will get in the way.... Yes thank you, I think I’ll go to sleep.” He closed his eyes. “Oh, I suppose I ought to move first,” he said opening them again with a weak laugh. “Mrs. McKerrow, please don’t worry, I’ll behave properly tomorrow, but I’m so tired—and my head....”

He turned to the doctor—trying to understand whether he was the man who could help him. He wanted help, for the pain in his head was driving him mad. But he must not tell the minister, for he ought not to trouble him. Did the doctor understand? He tried to see.

Dr. Grant had taken off his thick overcoat. His figure, though not tall, was strongly built and active. His closely cropped, black hair covered a well-developed head, and out of his eyes there looked the soul of a man with a large human sympathy. Now those kind blue eyes met the dimmed brown ones, as the doctor put his arm through Wilfred’s.

“It’s bed you’re wanting, man,” he said. “Come along! I’ll go up with you. Yes, say good-night; you won’t need to come down again.... Mrs. McKerrow will excuse you, so you needn’t trouble about that.... Come along.” ...

“I shall stay with him tonight,” he announced, coming into the warm dining-room about half-an-hour later. “He’s in for a bad time, I’m afraid. I wonder what he’s been doing with himself.”

“Poor, poor boy!” said the minister’s wife, with tears in her eyes. “I’m very glad you were here, Doctor. You must tell me what to do.”

Mrs. McKerrow had a genius for hospitality. She never considered the cost.

“He must have been through a bad time,” she said. “It seems strange that he should have come to us; and yet—God knows—it may be given to us to help him back to health and happiness again.”

“You’re fine!” cried the doctor with enthusiasm. “We’ll do it between us! It’ll be a good bit of work too, if we manage it.” ...

So Wilfred Cavendish lay in bed in the Manse guest-room, while his poor, tired brain broke loose from control, and he talked and moaned and cried in delirium. The minister’s wife nursed him. Dr. Grant spent many hours of the day, and most of the nights, in the sick room. His half-prophecy had been fulfilled, and the snow fell unceasingly—silent but baffling—until the roads to the village and the Manse were rendered impassable. The doctor was restricted to a very narrow round of visits. It was impossible to reach his more distant patients. He gave the extra time to the one who had come into his care so unexpectedly.

All communication with the outside world was cut off for three weeks, and the villagers began to look at one another with anxious faces, as the supply of provisions dwindled. There had been no such snow for thirty years. Not for fifty

years had heavy snow lain on the roads and filled the glen at such a time of the year.

For more than a week Wilfred lay in the darkened room, unconscious of the white world outside. During the first few days he was continually delirious. Sometimes he muttered incoherently. Sometimes the words came in clear excited tones.

“Martyn.... I’d give anything to undo it.... You won’t.... I hate you! I hate you!”

The fire died out of the unseeing eyes, and Wilfred went on in a low, monotonous voice.

“... Hasn’t fastened it ... luck.... You’ll be hurt now.... Gwenith.... Good old rhododendrons ... night.”

Again and again the brain worked the same dreary round. Then quiet.

Dr. Grant watched him intently.

Suddenly Wilfred started up—

“Martyn—Martyn—do you know how you hurt?”—The doctor put a comforting arm round the thin shoulders. “Yes—you know!” The shrill voice broke, and the head sank on to the pillows again. “You know—but you love it,” and the words ended in a sob.

Presently the doctor heard a different tone.

“But that’s wonderful, Martyn,” Wilfred was saying in a weak voice. “You make a fellow see things. You’re a brick—you—are—a brick.” The weak voice trailed off into silence....

Mrs. McKerrow came into the darkened room. She crossed over and stood by the bed.

“He seems quieter now,” she said, looking tenderly down at the thin drawn face below the large white handkerchief

which secured the ice bag.

But even as she spoke the brown eyes flashed open, and Wilfred looked at her unseeingly. His fingers plucked at the bed-clothes.

“Just the paper ... burn....” he muttered-pulling a corner of the sheet between his fingers. “But ... long time ... burn ... must all burn up ... all gray ashes.”

Mrs. McKerrow’s eyes were misty.

“Poor boy,” she said once more, in a husky voice. “Poor, dear boy.”

Again and again they heard the same thoughts monotonously repeated, and ever one name remained the dominant—persistently reiterated.

The snow still fell outside, and Painton looked in vain for a line from his master, while Mrs. McKerrow studied the doctor’s face with dread in her heart.

At last the delirium ceased; consciousness returned. One afternoon Wilfred opened his eyes, with the light of sanity in them once more. He was very weak—very tired. Slowly the realisation of his surroundings returned to him. Slowly, too, the memory of the terror from which he had fled. He lay very still—only half thinking. When he could think, he must act; so he would be slow to think. To lie in bed in that cheerful guest-room, with the glint of the sunlit snow outside, the tender ministries of love and skill within, was heavenly peace. Let him keep that peace as long as he could. He would not think.

But the day came when he could no longer avoid thought, and then he made a decision. Dr. Grant came in one afternoon, to find Wilfred anxious to have a talk with him.

“Can you get to town yet?” the lad asked in a very weak voice.

“Yes; for the first time for three weeks the roads are clear, with banks of snow high enough to bewilder one out of one’s knowledge of the locality on either side.”

“Then I want you to do something for me.”

“Certainly, if I can.”

“Can you spare the time to go to the town?”

“Auch—yes. What do you want there?”

“I left my car at the garage. Do you know it?”

“Being such a big place it only boasts one.”

“Will you please give me my keys? They’re in my pocket—the right side. Thanks.”

He fumbled with the bunch, then yielded it to Dr. Grant.

“I feel like a baby,” he said, as his arms dropped heavily back on to the bed. “Will you take that one? I want you to go to the car. On the right-hand side under the seat is a sort of cupboard. That’s the key. Will you unlock it and bring me the parcel you’ll find inside. There’s only one. Thank you very much. Bring it straight to me please. You can go now—at once—can’t you? Thanks.”

When the doctor had gone, Wilfred lay looking out at the snow—a flush on his cheeks, his eyes bright. Presently, exhausted with his effort, he fell asleep. He was awakened by Mrs. McKerrow coming in with a daintily-laid tray. Wilfred wanted nothing but to be left in peace, but his instinctive courtesy was reasserting itself. He did his best that she might not be disappointed, and the meal helped to strengthen him for the doctor’s return....

Wilfred took the brown paper parcel and turned it over meditatively.

“The paper’s all right, but it isn’t fastened securely enough. Will you get me some string, and some sealing wax? Bring them in and do it here, please, and then give me a pen to address it.”

“Can’t I do it all for you? It’s awkward writing in bed.”

Wilfred flushed hotly. “But I’d rather do it myself. You don’t mind, do you Doctor?”

“Auch—no! Do you want me to post it?”

“Please; and register it. Thank you very much.”

When the parcel was safely on its way, Wilfred closed his eyes again, and tried to sleep. He was very tired. Mrs. McKerrow came in and sat by the fire, busily knitting. Presently Wilfred spoke.

“I’ve been an awful bother, I know,” he said. “I can’t realise yet. I shall presently. I want just one thing more, please.”

“Yes, dear?” the minister’s wife suggested, looking up from her work.

“Will you tell my brother where I am, and that he hasn’t heard because I’ve been snowed up. And please ask him to write to me about—everybody.”

“I’ll do it at once. I would have written the day after you came only I hadn’t the address. Then the snow came. Is there anything else you want, dear?”

Wilfred looked at her mournfully. “‘Dear’—that’s nice! Yes, dear Mrs. McKerrow, there is. But everything I want is ungettable.” Then a sudden gleam came into his eyes. “But—would you believe it?—it isn’t a girl,” he added.



“You’re on the mend!” pronounced his nurse, with a smile, “and when you’re mended you will want—and you will find.”

“Meanwhile there is ... the sunlight on the snow,” Wilfred said, half cynically, “and ...” he looked at her gratefully —“there’s you.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### *HINDRANCES*

“I’LL call and see Cavendish before I go home,” Martyn said, as the chauffeur brought the car round to the door. “I want to have a talk with him.”

Lord Alwyn faced his friend, wishing that he could read the mind behind that non-committal face.

“I’m afraid he’s away,” he said. “I know that he meant to go this morning.”

“In that case I may perhaps be able to get his address. Good-bye. Leave the problem now. I shall win—you needn’t be afraid!” and Martyn took his place at the wheel. He hated to be driven!

“But somebody will suffer,” thought Lord Alwyn, as he looked after the upright figure. “It was a dastardly thing to do, and maybe he’ll get no more than he deserves. He certainly won’t get less. A wise scoundrel would have thought twice before attacking Martyn Royce.”

Painton opened the door in answer to the imperious summons of the bell. No. Mr. Cavendish was not at home. He had left that morning.

Martyn stepped into the hall, and the butler closed the door.

“Can you give me his address?”

Painton looked anxious. Was this quick curtness merely the impatience of a man who hated to be hindered, or was it the suppressed anger of an enemy? Painton wished that he knew.

“I am sorry, sir,” he said, in his respectful, deliberate tones, “but I don’t know it. I’m not forwarding any letters.”

“Oh! Have you any idea where I could find him? I want to see him very particularly.”

“Well sir, I can only tell you that Mr. Cavendish has gone to Scotland. He started early this morning.”

“Was he going by train?”

“No, sir. He was driving his own car.”

“Did he say how long he’d be away?”

“No, sir. I asked him for an address—because of Master Jim. He said he was going past Aberdeen, and as soon as he knew where he was going to stop he would send a line.”

“Oh! So you expect to hear?”

“In a day or two, sir.”

Martyn looked out of the window.

“I shall be obliged if you’ll let me know where he is as soon as you get word. I regret that I’ve missed him.”

“Yes, sir. Will you see Master Jim, sir?”

For a moment the hard features relaxed, the stern lips twitched. Painton saw it and wondered. Then Martyn said more naturally:

“I am sorry I can’t stay. I’m in a great hurry. Don’t tell him I called or he’ll be disappointed. You will send me word as soon as you hear?”

As Martyn sat upright in the car, driving it beyond Lord Alwyn’s limit, he set out his problem in detail. Whatever happened he would not have the help of the police—he would manage alone. So far as Wilfred was concerned he would not invoke the law. Morton Hillier would attend to any

legal difficulties that might arise in connection with his publishers; but Wilfred, he himself would deal with.

Had he been free he would have followed him at once. But there was Clare. He could not go north until he was sure that her illness was not serious. And there was his mother—to whom he felt that he owed nothing, but whom he could not leave altogether at the mercy of a scoundrel of a husband, and a bullying landlady. He must see Clare convalescent, his mother safe, and then—

But for a little while longer there might be tempestuous calm.

Martyn did not mention the loss of his book to Clare, but he had a long talk with Morton Hillier one afternoon in his study. He told Morton the facts, as Lord Alwyn knew them, but nothing beyond. He explained that he wished Hillier to write to his publishers, and to deal with any legal difficulties.

“I can’t be bothered with anything of that sort,” he added irritably, “and I shall never re-write the book.”

“What about the culprit?” asked Hillier. “Have you put the matter in the hands of the police?”

“No!” said Martyn shortly and grimly. “I’m dealing with him myself.”

“He’s nearly at the end of his tether,” thought Hillier, “something is going to happen!”

“Don’t you think you’d better let the law tackle him?” he suggested. “It’s simpler, and it’s safer.”

“Thanks; but I’m not out for simplicity or safety—as the blackguard will know when we meet!”

“You know who he is?” asked Hillier.

“If I didn’t know—don’t you think I’d hand the matter over to the police? I shouldn’t want the work of hunting down a common thief. As it is—” he stopped suddenly.

Again Hillier realized the tremendous tension on his nerves. Martyn strode up and down the room several times. When he spoke again it was in quite a different voice—cold and expressionless.

“My mother—Mrs. Mildmay—is living in Bloomsbury at present. Her husband has been away for a time. She’s among strangers, and there has been trouble. I want to be able to give her own address in case of need. You will act for me. If she requires money—advance it. If she needs legal advice—give it. I hope she won’t need either, but one cannot be sure. They’ve only been in England a short time, and things are not quite straight.... Of course this communication is given to you entirely in your professional capacity,” he added.

“Of course!” echoed Morton sharply. “I’ll see to anything that is necessary. Are you going soon?”

“As soon as I see that my wife is doing satisfactorily. Influenza is a wretched thing, but I think she’s over the worst of it.”

“Pam will be coming round to see her.”

“I’m glad. Then I’ll leave those matters with you. You have a free hand.”

“I wonder how long it is since he smiled,” thought Hillier, as he made his way home. “It was a low-down trick, but I feel tempted to pity the fellow, whoever he is. The law itself would be kinder than Martyn Royce in his present mood. But I suppose he really must have a soft side—anyway Clare believes in it.” ...

“You’re only stopping up here because you think that you look interesting among all those cushions,” declared Martyn, as he came into Clare’s room, and found her in a large easy chair by the fire.

“That’s it,” she agreed with a smile, as she held out her hand. “You’re most terribly discerning! Has Morton gone?”

“Yes. Did you want to see him?”

“Not this time. I’ve neglected you so shabbily. I’m longing to make amends.”

Martyn drew up a chair to her side. He leaned back so that she should not see his face, but kept her hand on his knee.

“You’re getting on now?” he suggested.

“Oh, yes. I shall soon be all right again; only the flu does make one feel so ridiculously weak!”

“What have you been doing with yourself, lazy one?”

“Just listening to the wind, and watching the storm wrack, and the battle of the clouds with the sun!”

“What a life!”

Clare looked away to the thin flying clouds touched with light. She wished that Martyn wanted to share his thoughts, but she would not ask him.

“I’ve had a lovely dream, too,” she said after a few moments of silence, nestling against his arm.

“Of course—you dreamer!”

“It was of one of those wonderful days when you first took me out for a sail. I was steering your boat—fighting against the stream. You should have seen me singing! I steered you right along the path of the sunlight, although there was a terrific current that opposed.”

She turned her head that she might see him, and for a moment the smile about which Hillier had speculated softened his features.

“You would! You’ve been trying to do it ever since those first days, whenever I’ve given you the rudder.... Tell me, little one, do you feel strong enough to manage the boat alone for a while?”

Clare caught her breath. She did not look at him now.

“I shall be about again in a few days. Are you going away?”

“For a day or two—perhaps a week—or even longer. There have been unexpected difficulties connected with my manuscript. I want to go north to make some investigations. I put it off till you were better.”

“Oh, Martyn—I’m so sorry!”

“Are you? Someone else may be glad!”

“Alice told me this morning that they’re having snow in Scotland, while we’ve not even begun to think of winter. How far are you going?”

“I’m not sure. Shall you want any letters?”

She turned her face towards the firelight.

“It will be so nice to have you away!” she said, brave laughter in her voice. “I haven’t had a letter from you for ages and ages! You’ll tell me everything, won’t you?”

“Ah”—he ejaculated slowly.

He passed his hand over her shining hair, and for a moment his face softened. Then he released his arm, readjusted the cushions on her chair—and rose.

He stood looking down at her with an expression that she could not understand.

“It’s the angel who wants so much now,” he said, in a level voice.

“But never too much,” she reminded him.

He looked at her gravely. Then he turned away without answering, and Clare was left wondering who had wounded him so deeply.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *IN STRANGE COMPANY*

MARTYN went north to find Wilfred, and Clare was left alone, to battle with the depression that so frequently follows influenza, deepened by the black shadow of a searchless cloud.

Pam Hillier—breezy and dainty—visited her as soon as she was convalescent, and brought delightful and alluring stories of the children, who were Clare's so frequent delight.

"You must come and see them as soon as ever you feel fit," Pam said as she was leaving. "Come right away when you feel inclined. You needn't trouble to let me know, or to bring anything but what you carry on you. I'll fix you up for the night; and Rex will think it's ten birthdays in one!"

"That will be heavenly. I hope you mean it. One day I shall come down on you without warning. You may not be able to get rid of me very easily."

"I shan't try," Pam promised gaily. "But you'd better have the impulse before that husband of yours returns, or the visit will be too short." ...

But Clare's first visit was to the Infirmary, to see Mrs. Buchanan—the fragile little old woman with the broken thigh. Clare had promised that she would go; she fulfilled her promise as soon as she was able, leaving all her troubles behind.

Although it was not the scheduled time, the Sister invited her to stay, and quick pleasure lit the patient's dim eyes as

she saw her visitor, and the bright offering of her old-world garden.

“It’s real good of you, m’dear,” she said in a weak voice. “You were kind to me that day, but I didn’t think as how you’d remember after.”

“But I promised,” Clare reminded her, feeling again the pathetic bravery of the old woman who—white and shrunken—lay on the narrow bed, harassed still by pain. “I should have been before, if influenza hadn’t stopped me. I was afraid you might think that I’d broken my promise. You are comfortable here?”

Mrs. Buchanan looked down the long ward, with its trim beds, its table of instruments and apparatus—so brightly polished. A young nurse was distributing slices of bread and butter—placing them on the lockers by the different beds.

“They’re very kind to me,” she said slowly. “Very kind! But I’m old now.... It seems sort o’ lonely in a big place where you don’t belong. I don’t think as how I’ll last a great while.... I’d like to die at home, but there’s no one there, and I can’t look after myself now. They thinks here as I oughtn’t to want to move. Nurse says I’m ungrateful, but ... I want home. My daughter’s goin’ to take me to hers.... I’m glad you come first.”

“So am I,” agreed Clare. “And I can just understand your longing.”

She loosened the white paper from the flowers she had brought, and laid them on the coverlet between the fragile hands.

“My garden was very kind. It gave me this whole bunch of crimson summer roses.”

Mrs. Buchanan held the roses against her face.

“How sweet they smell, m’dear. When I was a gel we had some like these. But that’s a long time ago.” She gently fingered the companion bunch—of fresh garden chrysanthemums. “These always smells sort o’ clean and good,” she said. “But them roses seems like a young gel what doesn’t know why she’s just growin’ so winnin’ for love.”

The nurse came up and filled the mug on the locker with tea from a large enamelled jug.

“You are going to have an egg that was laid yesterday,” Clare said. “And Sister says I may stay. I love waiting on people.”

She sat by the bed, helping the invalid with her tea, talking to her, listening to her, not hurrying to depart. And the old woman forgot the loneliness of the long ward, forgot the troubles that had burdened her brave heart, as peace at last enfolded her through the spirit that had found its spring.

At last Clare rose to go.

“Here’s Naomi,” exclaimed the old woman, as a quietly dressed though arresting figure came down the long ward. “That’s my daughter. She’s goin’ to take me to her home.”

Clare looked up. When had she seen that face and figure before?... She remembered!... One afternoon, when she and Martyn were having tea in Regent Street. This woman had come in with a man whom Martyn knew. Clare remembered her husband’s caustic comment as the man uncomfortably looked the other way.... Somehow Clare had not been able to forget the woman, and the scarlet flowers at her breast.

“This is the lady that was so good to me the day what I fell, Naomi,” her mother explained, “and now she’s bin

talkin' to me that kind. It's bin a treat."

"It is good of you, madam," Naomi said, distantly. "My mother told me of your kindness."

"Mrs. Buchanan has given me a very happy time," Clare responded frankly. She took one of the shrunken hands between her own, as she said good-bye. When she turned, Naomi's white hands were busy among the flowers that Clare had brought.

"Good-evening, madam," she said remotely, "and thank you for coming." ...

Clare drove away from the Infirmary, puzzled by the strange magnetism of the woman who lived in a world that she did not know, who felt the beauty of flowers, and had a mother simple and brave.

Just as her carriage neared home a brown terrier ran out into the road about twenty yards ahead. A motor was coming from the opposite direction. Before the chauffeur could stop the car the dog was beneath it. Clare called to Collyer to stop and stepped from her victoria as the dog dashed from beneath the car, howling pitifully. The poor creature ran frantically round and round in a circle, then—its energy spent—collapsed. In another minute the writhing body was still.

Clare drove on, chilled by that picture of mad circling—of a frantic energy which strove to defy defeat....

Martyn was still away. His letters were brief and unsatisfactory. A few afternoons later, as she was having her tea alone, the post brought a note telling her that he would not be home for several days. Then Clare thought of Pam's invitation.

It had been a beautiful day. She would enjoy a walk, and she would be just in time for the children. She would be able to see Girlie in her bath; she might perhaps read to Rex before he went to sleep; and perhaps—perhaps—she might help to put the baby to bed. Clare put Martyn's letter where she could still feel it, and ran upstairs.

How had she managed to live without the children for so long! She was hungering for the touch of them. She could not wait another hour!

She found Alice, who was rather bewildered by the suddenness of her plans.

"I'm going to Mrs. Hillier's, Alice," Clare explained. "I expect I shall stay the night, and come back in time for lunch tomorrow."

"Can I get your things ready for you?" Alice suggested willingly.

"Thank you, but I'm not taking anything. I want to hurry—to be there before the children go to bed."

"But won't you want *anything* ma'am?" persisted Alice incredulously.

Clare smiled. "I'll find everything I need at the other end."

"Does Collyer know—or shall I tell him?"

"No, thank you. I'm walking. If I should be coming back tonight, I'll be home before ten. Don't wait up for me after that."

"Do you know when Mr. Royce will be back, ma'am?" Alice asked, as she opened the door.

"Not for several days at least," Clare said, pausing in her hurry. "At any rate he won't be home tonight. Good-bye."

She ran lightly down the steps, and Alice stood looking after her, with a comfortable smile, as she went down the drive in the clear autumn twilight, her feet speeding her towards the little ones she loved.

But before she had gone far her plans were unexpectedly changed. In the distance she recognised the woman Naomi. She was coming towards her. When they were nearly level, Naomi made as if she would stop.

“Were you coming to see me?” Clare asked, thinking desirously of the wee girlie in her bath.

“Yes, madam.... I didn’t like to trouble you, but my mother wanted it so badly.”

“What is it?” Clare asked sympathetically.

“She’s been talking about you ever since you came to see her at the Infirmary, and by mistake I let her know that you had left your address, with the flowers.”

“That wasn’t a mistake. I wanted to see her again. Does she want to see me?”

“Yes, madam. You know the fancies that old people get. I think she’s near the end. She’s worried about things, and she fancies you can help her. For myself, I think it’s no good bothering about what’s coming after. But she was so troubled. I couldn’t do less than come. Is it asking too much?”

Clare remembered that thin hand holding tightly a worn purse and shabby string bag; she remembered the old woman’s silent endurance and wonderful gratitude. Of course she would go to her. She would help her if she could.

“I’ll come back with you now,” she said. “I am glad we met. I’m quite free. Is it far? Shall we have a taxi?”

“If you don’t mind coming with me,” Naomi said doubtfully.... “Do you mind, madam?”

“Why of course not!” responded Clare without hesitation.

“Then we can take the bus as far as it goes; then a taxi if you wish.”

“Very well,” agreed Clare; and as they went on together, she put aside the dream of rounded baby limbs and glistening golden curls, for a needy woman had called.

Neither made any attempt at conversation in the bus. The woman whose bartered bloom would be so short-lived, looked at the woman whose beauty would grow. Then she turned away, with a sudden strange sense of loss. Clare—her thoughts swinging free of her errand—went back to Martyn, as sunflowers turn to the sun. She was unconscious of the passage of time.

They got out at the terminus. As they stood on the pavement, waiting for a break in the busy traffic, a well-dressed man came up to them, raising his hat. Naomi turned. Clare did not see the angry light in her eyes. She spoke low and fiercely. Clare moved a few paces away, into the full light of the street-lamp, her thoughts still with Martyn. She raised her eyes towards the big building opposite, by the windows of which sat men and women at small tables eating and drinking. A man seated at one of those tables saw her for a moment; saw Clare—fine, remote—standing in the light, in the midst of that thronging crowd. Then he saw that she was not alone....

Clare heard the man at her side say—

“At least I will see you into a taxi.” He hailed a passing driver.

Naomi glanced at Clare. "It's not very far," she explained quickly. "You will be all right."

"Why, of course," said Clare, turning to her with a smile—a smile that evoked no response.

As the taxi drew up to the pavement, the man put his hand lightly on Clare's waist. "Allow me," he said suavely.

Naomi caught his arm sharply, and Clare stepped into the taxi free. Naomi followed. She shut the door with a bang. The man stepped back into the shadow, and for a moment stood looking after them—out of sight of the man at the window; then he turned and was lost in the crowd.

"That was my husband, madam," explained Naomi, flushing. "He oughtn't to have spoken when you were with me. I am sorry."

"It was all right," responded Clare wondering.

"I wouldn't let it be anything else!" Naomi exclaimed, suppressed passion in her voice. Then she relapsed into silence, her mouth grim....

In a few minutes they had reached the tall building, and the small flat for which Naomi paid three times its honest rent. They went in together. It was clean, and sparsely furnished; and while Naomi's mother shared it, it was inviolable. Her daughter lived on what she had saved.

Clare took off her hat and coat, and left them in the sitting-room before going into the bedroom where she found a welcome.

Mrs. Buchanan had faced a hard life bravely; she had been courageous before poverty, sickness, and injustice. Now her courage was deserting her as she looked towards the dark Unknown. The strange future called forth terrors. She



believed that the one who had held her hand as she lay lonely and in pain on the damp pavement, and who had visited her in the ward, could understand and help her. So she had called to Clare, and Clare had come.

Clare tried to understand, so that understanding she might help. For herself, the Unknown was not darkness; the veil which hid it seemed as gossamer—through which the sunlight streamed. Her advent to this world had been anticipated by love; love had welcomed her when she arrived. One day she would pass on to another sphere where, too, her coming would have been anticipated, and love would welcome her once more.

The woman Naomi, who thought that Clare would not have travelled with her had she known the manner of her living, had no dread of any consequences of that living following her into the Unseen; yet the woman whose life had been almost blameless, was broken by a sense of guilt; and the thought of the unknown future burdened her with fears. Far away her dim eyes saw the lights of a Celestial City, but darkness surrounded her, and she stumbled and fell as she groped despairingly towards the haven beyond. The old large-print Bible on which her spectacles rested had been her constant companion, but now she could not feel its comfort; it was not for such as she. Because her standard was high, she saw her life a failure; because she had a strong religious consciousness, all her finest work seemed of less than no avail.

Up and down the street outside passed the unceasing traffic. On the stairs sounded the continual tread of feet. The gas in the bedroom was lowered. The fire in the small grate fitfully illumined the room. Naomi moved about restlessly.

Once she went out on to the landing, then returning carefully locked the door, and came back to the room, to busy herself with things that did not matter. And Clare sat by the bed, growingly understanding; fighting grim fear, and fighting to win.

The clock ticked on unheeded. The tired brain which had nearly finished its work could take in no more thoughts, but the dying woman was conscious of the strength of the hand that held her own; the peace in the soul that was coming out to hers enfolded her, and terror fled.

Presently she drifted into unconsciousness. She had passed all fear. Beyond the sleep would be the awakening—an awakening to the welcome of Love....

At last Clare realized the time. She rose quietly and went into the other room. She found that Naomi had prepared cocoa and sandwiches. Clare accepted them gratefully.

“What will you do, madam? It is very late.”

“Yes. I had no idea of the time. Shall I be in the way if I rest in the chair?”

“If you are sure you won’t mind? But I could see you home, madam, if you would let me.”

“They will all have gone to bed. I will go early, if I may stay now. Won’t you share these sandwiches?” and Clare pushed the plate forward with a hand that Naomi noticed was less white than her own.

“Thank you, madam. I do not want anything.”

“But I hate to eat alone,” Clare protested with a smile.

Naomi sat down without another word, and they took the simple supper together.

Did she understand? Did she know?... Naomi sat silent, wondering about her friendly companion.... Presently she looked up to meet the steady gaze of eyes that looked on the terrors of darkness, and had caught and held the splendour of the light.

The woman moved uneasily.

“I will make you comfortable on the ottoman, madam,” she said rising.

“And you?” suggested Clare quietly.

“I could not sleep. You must rest.”

She turned away. Suddenly she felt Clare’s hands on her shoulders. A warm shy kiss fluttered down and rested on her cheek. She stood very still. She had never been kissed like that before, ... Yes—this woman knew: but she would never, never understand. She was only terribly sorry....

While Clare slept fitfully on the improvised bed, and Mrs. Buchanan lay in peaceful unconsciousness, Naomi sat up—wide-eyed, intent—guarding her treasures.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### *“THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES”*

MARTYN had ascertained from Painton that no word had been received from Wilfred. He knew that the butler was convinced that his master had gone through Aberdeen, and he realized that Wilfred in his madness would not give the one whom he had robbed credit for sufficient discernment to enable him to discover the thief, therefore he would not be deliberately hiding. Martyn imagined rightly that Wilfred had no thought of punishment. Had Wilfred—lying unconscious and delirious in the Manse guest-room—been able to see the face of his one-time friend, he would not have been so short-sighted.

It was not easy to trace him unaided, but Martyn would not wait until Wilfred should choose to make his whereabouts known. Wilfred had had more than a week's respite. Martyn thought harshly that later on he might be grateful for that! By the end of the next week he had definite information, and he felt that his quest would soon be over, as he took the train for the small town where Wilfred had left his car.

But it was a slow tedious journey, for Martyn had reached the region of the snow. As the train moved slowly on between the piled masses which lined its narrow track, his irritability grew with each mile, though he was conscious of neither weariness nor cold. The great overshadowing banks of snow shut out the view of the weird, white world beyond—shut him in to the darkened carriage, alone with thoughts that burned.

At last the train steamed slowly into the dimly lit, almost deserted station. Martyn stepped on to the platform to find himself in the midst of snow-covered country, across which the keen air blew fresh and sweet from the hills. The small town gleamed whitely through the night; the level fields and distant star-lit slopes were transfigured by the magic of the snow. Martyn only vaguely realised his surroundings. He had come to settle his account with the man who had once worshipped and since had wronged him. The pure keen air, the unsullied snow, the wonderful silence of the starlit spaces, meant nothing to him. He had been shamefully wronged: that was all that he realised. The sense of wrong was narrowing his world. Wilfred must have been very short-sighted when he imagined that he could defy Martyn Royce; but Martyn's sight was even shorter, for he was missing all the mysterious splendour of star-lit snow while anger darkened his vision.

He went to the one hotel that the town boasted, intending to stay there for the night, and go on to the village of Keltoul the next morning, but he was checked by forces with which he had not reckoned.

The "hotel" was a very small one, and, having few visitors at that time of the year, each newcomer was noted and remembered and discussed. So it was inevitable that, having traced Wilfred thus far, Martyn should hear more of him. As he sat and smoked after dinner, the landlord hovered round, loquaciously communicative.

Without asking questions Martyn soon learned that he had made no mistake. He was on the right track; but at the same time he discovered that it had a barrier.

"The gentleman left his car here," explained the rotund landlord, continuing his wordy story, while he smoked his

pipe, and looked curiously at the hard features of his latest visitor.

“He came along one evening—same as you’ve done. He wanted to get out to Keltoul, but the roads were bad—he couldn’t get the car through. He seemed set on going, so he left the car here and started to walk. I warned him as much as I dared, but he didn’t listen. He just went off as if demons were after him. I heard that Dr. Grant picked him up. Lucky for him he did, or he might be walking still—or lying stiff under the snow.”

“His car is still here?” asked Martyn, jerking one foot on to his knee, and gripping the ankle with his strong, nervous fingers.

“Yes, and as far as I can see it’ll be here for some time yet. I’m not Scotch myself—as you may have guessed—and I’m not much struck on these out-of-the-way places, where you may be left outside the world for weeks. I only came because of the missus. This place belonged to her father. I shall get back to civilization as soon as I can.”

“But this sort of weather is unusual—even up here?” suggested Martyn, leaning forward to flick cigarette ash into the fender.

“Yes, but once bitten.... This is a dull place at best.”

“Except when you have visitors.”

“That isn’t often! Now—it’s just providential you came, or I’m sure me and the missus would have had words. We were getting so tired of just ourselves and no one else, and no news.”

“Hasn’t the owner of the car been back again?”

“He couldn’t if he wanted to.”

“Why not?”

The red-faced man took his pipe out of his mouth, knocked it against his boot, then proceeded to refill it.

“Well, you see,” he said, ramming the tobacco down with his little finger, “the snow’s bin such as I never saw before, and never want to again. No one’s bin able to get to Keltoul, or come from there since about two days after that gentleman went. There was a man died here. He’d quarrelled with everyone in the town. The only person he had a good word for was Dr. Grant—the doctor at Keltoul. He was very ill—Dr. Grant was attending him; but when the snow came no one could get through. The poor old chap—a cantankerous old chap he was though!—had to go out of it alone. He wouldn’t have no one else. But it was a good thing for the other gentleman that Dr. Grant got snowed in instead of out.”

“Which gentleman? Why?”

“The one with the car. I heard his name was Cavendish. One of the maids came over from the Manse the next day to see my wife. She said the gentleman was taken ill as soon as he got there. She said he was very bad—some queer name I didn’t know—and the doctor had bin up all night with him. She seemed to think he might die. The Manse was all upside down.”

“Have you heard since?” Martyn asked in a level voice.

“A chap got through one day. He had a fight for it; and he hasn’t bin able to get back. He said Mrs. McKerrow and the doctor were nursing the gentleman, and the children had bin sent to their aunt’s. The house was kep’ as silent as the grave, and the bedroom was all dark. Dr. Grant’s a bachelor, and a great friend of the minister. They say he spends a lot of his

time at the Manse. The kiddies love him. It was lucky for Mr. Cavendish that he landed there.”

Martyn threw his half-finished cigarette into the fire.

“Are the roads still impassable?”

“Yes. It’ll be a week at any rate before we’ll get through, I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s rather rough on Mr. Cavendish if he wants his friends—and him dying perhaps.”

“And rather rough on his friends,” retorted Martyn, as he rose from his chair. “Good-night. I shall be off by the morning train. Breakfast early.” And he went heavily up to his cheerless room.

It was no good staying in the north waiting for the snow to clear, or Wilfred to recover. For once Martyn was baffled. But even though the stars in their courses fought against him, he would get justice in the end! Meanwhile he would go back to Clare and—perhaps—he would begin to work again....

But the return journey was tediously prolonged, and another night passed before he was able to leave Aberdeen. The evening of the following day found him nearing his journey’s end—tired out, frustrated, bitter of soul.

He had let memory tell him of the many who had failed him: of the girl in the factory, who had broken his dreams, and shown him ugliness for beauty; of his mother who had spoiled his boyhood and burdened his later manhood; of Wilfred—the friend he had truly loved.... He dwelt on the thought of Wilfred with bitterness....

But at the end of the journey would be Clare. His thoughts turned to her—to rest. He had not sent her word of his coming. It would be good to see her eyes light up at his



return! It would be heaven to find the healing of her presence!...

He was about to get into a taxi when he remembered that Clare would not be expecting him to dinner. He crossed the road and entered the large restaurant opposite the station. He found a table by an open window, and began to read the evening paper as he waited for the steak that he had ordered. The waiter was a long time bringing the steak, and the paper was not interesting. He put it down and looked out of the window at the moving traffic.

Men, women, children, thronged the lamp-lit street. Heavy vehicles rumbled deafeningly past. Martyn looked on insensibly. He had no part in that life. His normal interest was dulled.... But suddenly the scene changed its character. It became living—real. His consciousness burned into life!

In the midst of that thronging crowd, standing in the light of the street lamp, was Clare—Clare looking fresh and beautiful, her eyes for a moment raised towards his. For a moment Martyn saw her only; then he saw the woman at her side, and in her shadow Clare's beauty changed. He had seen the woman before. He knew more of her than Clare did.... And they were not alone!... The hot blood darkened Martyn's cheeks and throbbed in his temples.... That man!... Martyn knew his tribe too well; knew far too much of such men and women ever to be deceived.

A taxi was stopping in front of them. Martyn saw the man put his arm on Clare's waist—saw her move to enter the vehicle. The next moment, a moment in which he seemed paralyzed, the taxi started forward, and Clare, the man, and the woman were out of sight. With a smothered oath he flung out of the room, out of the restaurant and into the street. But

the taxi had disappeared. It would be absolutely vain to attempt to trace it through that crowded thoroughfare; yet for a moment Martyn was madly inclined to try. Then he saw that the only thing he could do was to go home—to find there a refutation of that vision?... He could not tell what he imagined as he flew past slower going vehicles—driven by a man whom a promise of double payment had made reckless—to the home where he had dreamed of finding a welcome.

Alice was coming down the stairs as he put his key in the lock. She stopped in astonishment as the door opened and Martyn entered.

“We didn’t expect you tonight, sir,” she gasped, with a broad smile of welcome.

“No, I suppose not,” he said in a toneless voice; and the smile died. “Where is Mrs. Royce?”

“She’s out, sir. She will be sorry. Have you had dinner, sir?”

“Is Mrs. Royce dining out?”

“She’s gone to Mrs. Hillier’s. She said she wouldn’t be back before tomorrow morning.”

“Oh!”

Martyn passed Alice and went into the study.

“I’m glad she has gone there,” he remarked, his back to the maid. “I suppose she drove?”

“No, sir. She said she’d walk. She didn’t take any luggage. Can I get you anything?”

“No!” shortly. “Take the portmanteau upstairs, and then don’t bother me any more. I shall be going out.”

He shut the door sharply, and Alice made a face.

Clare had said she was going to see Pam! Then he must go to see Morton—though he knew that he should not find his wife. His brain was on fire. He could not think clearly—he could not see.... The only image before him was Clare—with “a woman who was a sinner” and a man—whom at that moment he would willingly have killed!...

So Clare had failed him too! That was all that he could feel. His reasoning powers were in abeyance.... He would go to see Morton Hillier—but he knew that he should not find his wife.... What was he going for? He must have a reason.... What was Morton doing for him? Why couldn't he remember!... Oh—some business in connection with the publishers.... Yes—that was it. His book had been destroyed. Wilfred had taken it. Well, it didn't matter much now. “I have only one more precious possession in the world than that,” he had said to Lord Alywn. Now the less precious possession had lost all value. But Hillier was seeing about it. He could go and ask Hillier if he had heard from the publishers.... How stifling it was. He could not breathe. He would walk. Why hurry to learn what he already knew? He knew Clare was not with Pam. Yet she had said that she was going, and she had thought that he was far away....

“I wasn't expecting to see you back yet,” said Morton cheerily, as he entered the room where Martyn waited for him.

“No? No one seems to be expecting me,” said Martyn hardly. “I came back sooner than I intended. I thought I'd look in on my way home and see whether you have settled things.”

“Settled—no. But we are settling.”

Pam came into the room.

“I think you have come back too soon,” she said smiling, as she held out her hand.

“Why?” said Martyn fiercely, and she looked at him in astonishment.

“Don’t be hurt!” she said lightly. “Only I was hoping that Clare would come to stay, and now you’ve come home of course she won’t.”

“Oh—she hasn’t taken advantage of my absence then?”

“What can Clare see in him to worship as she does?” Pam thought. “No,” she said. “But I asked her.”

“Then you just have to take your share of disappointment like other people,” he said coolly. “No—I’m not stopping.” He was at the door. “I want to get home. I only called to ask Hillier about some letters. I won’t wait to look at them now.”

“Shall I bring them in in the morning?” Morton suggested. “I wanted to see you about that other commission you gave me. Things have been rather bad.”

Martyn was looking out into the darkness—he did not seem to hear.

“Shall I call in the morning?” Hillier repeated.

Martyn started. “All right,” he said vaguely. Then he went down the path.

Morton turned to Pam. She was looking at him questioningly.

“I don’t know,” he said, in answer to her look. “But he wouldn’t have turned a hair if I had told him he was ruined.”

Martyn never afterwards dared to look back upon the agony of that night, when the enemy came in like a flood, and the strongholds were taken. The past months of study of evil things; the destruction of the fruit of that study by the hand of

the man who had been his friend; the baffled pursuit of his enemy and the bitterness of frustrated revenge, had together been ruthlessly weakening his defences—as the cray-fish working their will unobserved on the solid walls of a sea-washed country, make it possible for the ocean to destroy those walls and devastate the land.

Again and again Martyn returned to the black nadir of that long arid journey. He had turned from the impregnable snow-girt village which had balked him of justice, baffled and bitter; but as he drew near the journey's end his bitter thoughts had been lost in hungry longing for the woman he loved with all his soul—the woman who made his world.

Then he had seen her ... seen his wife, with a man who bore his villainy legibly written on his face; and even while he looked, they two had passed out of his sight together.

Now Martyn was alone in the house that was desolate.

The past heat of his anger against Wilfred was as nothing compared with the fire that burned in his brain now. It writhed itself round his reason until reason—still struggling—stood shrivelled and distorted. It sent its evil breath down into the heart that was love's shrine, and beat upon its treasure until love's agony yielded to unconsciousness.

Through the long lonely night the cruel fire burned. When the morning came reason and love lay vanquished.

And something else—intangible and beautiful—was destroyed too. The subtle vibrations through which Martyn and Clare had been able to communicate with each other when far apart, no longer carried their messages. The wonderful sympathy which had interpreted the woman to the man lay wrapped in a sleep that looked like death.

## CHAPTER XXX

### *DE PROFUNDIS*

MORTON HILLIER was in the study with Martyn. He had brought the letters that he had wished Martyn to see, and had told him briefly and concisely of his interview with Mrs. Mildmay, whose husband had not yet returned. Martyn had listened to the story, with sharp, caustic comments. He had read the letters and given his judgment. And all the while Morton was wondering what lay behind those set features—what demon hardened those eyes and forbade the body to rest.

There was a sound in the hall outside. A bright voice was asking eager questions. Morton looked up from the papers in his hand. Martyn stopped in his restless pacing and stood by the mantelpiece, his eyes on the door. The door was thrown open and Clare came in, tired but radiant.

Morton rose. He looked at Clare, for a moment forgetting Martyn. In spite of her evident weariness, the light of gladness in her eyes was unmistakable. She crossed the room eagerly.

Martyn passed without looking at her, closed the door she had left ajar, then returned to his place on the hearthrug. Suddenly the light died out of Clare's face.

With instinctive courtesy she turned to Morton and held out her hand; but she could not speak—the atmosphere caught her breath. Then she looked again at her husband. He did not move, and the expression in his eyes held her back. The glad words of welcome died on her lips. The joy in her heart was slain.

“Why have you come back?” he asked, and his tone cut into her soul.

She looked at him—utterly at a loss. Neither seemed conscious of Morton’s presence, and Morton felt that he could not move.

“Martyn!” she breathed. “Whatever do you mean?” Her voice had lost its music.

“You were free to go,” he said fiercely, “but hardly free to return again. I did not know that I had married—”

Did Martyn say it, or was she suffering from some awful delusion? As the word left his lips, Clare looked at him—not comprehending. It reached her brain, but she could not realize its significance.

Her still, white face frightened Morton. He burned to fight, but a deep understanding of Clare held him back. He knew that she would accept no man’s championship against her husband. Yet, in spite of his understanding, he expected passionate resentment—anger—a hot outburst of indignation. But none of these things came. Clare looked at her husband, standing with his back to the fire, and facing her with an expression such as she had never seen on any man’s face before. He was the man she had loved with a supreme passion—the man she would have trusted against all the world—the man who had once stretched out a hand in the darkness, which had seemed to her like the Hand of God. Now there was only hatred in his eyes; no—more than hate—madness ... and the name he had used to her—who kept her great love for him alone—surely nothing but madness could have brought that to his lips. Still she did not retaliate. Morton watched her distractedly—for a moment that seemed a lifetime. Then words came—indignant, yet wondering.

“Martyn! Wherever did you suppose that I had been?”

“Suppose!” he echoed witheringly, and in his eyes was a passion that would haunt her through weary months. “I saw you—and your friends—outside the station! I suppose you expect me to think that innocent. Innocent!”—and Clare could not recognize the voice of the man who had once wooed and won her—“Innocent!—I’ve told you what I think. Now you had better go—to them.”

Morton was seeing red, but still he held himself back—for Clare’s sake. Clare would fight her battle alone. He hoped she would forget that he was there. Yet was she fighting?

“But, Martyn—you must be mad—”

“You only make it worse by standing there arguing. No don’t come near me!”—and Martyn began to pace up and down the room once more. “I hope never to see you again! Will you go?”

Clare moved towards the door. As she passed, she looked up at Morton with a brave attempt at a smile.

“Forget it,” she said in a low voice. “It’s just a big blunder... No—don’t come.”

Then she went out alone, closing the door behind her.

She hardly felt anything, the blow had been too overpowering, it had left a great numbness. She went quietly downstairs to the kitchen and gave Mrs. Lambert the orders for the day. She wondered vaguely—would she have another meal in that house—the home she loved so dearly? Perhaps not, yet still meals must be prepared, and servants must not know that meals did not matter!... She was going out. She might not be back to lunch, she said. Yes, she would order the



things for which Mrs. Lambert would be waiting. Not until she had settled all the details did she leave the house.

She went first to the shops—as she had promised, and carefully considered her purchases, forgetting nothing. Then, as if something essential had suddenly broken, she could think no more.... She must get away alone.

For a moment it was not Martyn who haunted her thought, but a poor brown terrier who had been run over by a car! She seemed to see it again as it ran frantically round and round after its mortal injury. She heard the pitiful howling. She saw the sudden collapse. Somehow she became identified with that dog. It was she who had been wounded; she who could still keep on.... Suddenly the identity ceased. The terrier's fate was less cruel than hers. Her staying powers would be greater than those of the wounded animal. When would she, too, be able to stop—to be conscious no more?

She walked on—away from the shops—away to narrow streets where she was not known, then past those towards broader spaces where she had to guess her road. There was no smile on her face now—no hope in her heart—no courage—no faith. Only blackness of darkness, through which no light could penetrate. Once before, it seemed so long ago, darkness had enfolded her, and through that darkness a hand had gripped hers and helped her back towards the light. She had thought it the Hand of God. Now that same hand had thrust her down into far deeper darkness; the voice that had wooed her back to joyous life had cursed her with the foulest of all names a woman can receive; the eyes that had met and held her own with their wonderful love-light, had looked into hers with the hate born of a brain on fire.

Clare walked on, not knowing where she went. Old scenes returned to her, bringing torture. During happy wholesome days, memory is often quiescent; but when life is unstrung, she tosses her hidden possessions wearisomely to the soul too tired to control.

Now she showed Clare a sheltered green spot on a hill above the blue waters of a bay, and Martyn standing there in the flickering sunlight. She repeated in her brain the words that had once thrilled her—as Martyn kept her hands in his. “You haven’t seen the Heavens open yet.... You will when you love!” And the vision of another dreamer became the epilogue of that story:—“I saw there was a road to hell from the gate of heaven as well as from the City of Destruction.” A road to hell from the gate of heaven—and she had found it!...

Trams—buses—motors—taxis—passed noisily; she heard nothing. Bright-eyed babies looked up into her unresponsive eyes; she could not realize them now. For her, once more, the world was changed. She had lost the centre, where there is always calm, and she was caught in the fury of the cyclone.

While she was still half numb from the wounding, a richly stored memory offered balm for relief... She had been made foul by suggestion; she was loathing a hand had gripped hers and helped her back towards the light. She had thought it the Hand of God. Now that same hand had thrust her down into far deeper darkness; the voice that had wooed her back to joyous life had cursed her with the foulest of all names a woman can receive; the eyes that had met and held her own with their wonderful love-light, had looked into hers with the hate born of a brain on fire.

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While she was still half numb from the wounding, a richly stored memory offered balm for relief.... She had been made foul by suggestion; she was loathing Faith had failed, but Love—so much greater—held. Even in her desperation Clare thought first of the man she loved. Whatever happened she must not harm him.... Yet, somehow she must go!

On and on she walked—she did not know where. So long as she walked, it did not matter. The sun came out. The early morning had been cold, and Clare had shivered as she left the house. Now the heat seemed more than she could bear. She toiled wearily up the hills in the sunshine—envying the broken dog who could lie down so soon. Surely her heart would fail—then she too, might be able to rest.

But her heart did not fail her. Still she kept on. She never thought of food. She had only one desire—to walk till it was impossible to walk any farther; and behind that desire the determination not to do anything to harm the man she loved.

Thought now tormented her. The futile “if” beat persistently against her brain. If only she had left the old woman unnoticed on the damp ground, and had never stayed to help. If only she had started to see Pam ten minutes earlier. If only Martyn.... But events had happened so simply that they seemed to have been inevitable. Clare had the conviction that by some means or other the crisis would have come; she could not have averted it, even if she could have foreseen.

If she could break down—as she had broken down in the hospital! That would be the simplest way out, for no one would suspect; except Morton, who would keep silent for her sake. If she could but reach the Borderland again—the Borderland that lies along the Region of the Shadows—surely she would not be forced back into life once more; into life which she could not face after the madness that she had seen in her husband’s eyes.

She had wanted to go once before—but how different that desire had been! She had confessed her longing to Martyn, when the longing was past, and he had given her a radiant joy in life. She remembered that Sunday morning on the cliff above the sea. She had sat alone in a great peace, while the church bells sent their music seawards—an endless Hallelujah! Then the sun had suddenly conquered the clouds. At a sound, she had turned, the light dazzling her; and through that light, indistinct but radiant, she had seen Martyn; and the day had become full of glory.

Now she would not let him harm her; she would not harm him. Nothing he had given her should bear an evil harvest for which he could be held accountable.

Her pulses throbbed, her body ached. Yet foot-sore, soul-sick she could still keep on. Then if she could keep on, she must go home—for Martyn's sake, though Martyn wanted never to see her again. If she did not go he would suffer; so she would have to go—for the sake of the man who had thought her infamous!

No! She would go for the sake of the man who had once brought light into the darkness for her; the man who had loved her when he had the world to choose from; the man who could wound so cruelly only because he had such a wonderful power to heal; the man who could turn back when he was busy for the sake of a dog that was hurt.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### *THE MIRACLE OF HEALING*

SOMEHOW the days were lived through; four leaden days of torture, four nights of despair. The fifth day came, yet Clare had not broken down. She could still attend to her household duties, could direct her servants, could tramp alone along the miles that led to nowhere in the sunshine that showed her no light.

She had returned home, though Martyn had said that he wanted never to see her again. They had met in the hall. In his eyes was still the madness that had haunted her all through her walk, but he had accepted her return without comment. She had seen little of him since.

Each morning they breakfasted together, while Martyn looked at the paper uncomprehendingly. His evenings were spent away from home. At night, Clare, alone in the darkness, lay listening for the sound of his footsteps. She thought of the feet that had once bounded lightly up the stairs, impatient to reach her. Those feet dragged heavily now. Long after midnight she heard his door open—and close ... then silence—and a great darkness.

From his study—once her paradise—she was now debarred; but she was free to roam the world. Free! Martyn had told her that she would always be free. There was the whole world to choose from, and—she was free!

Those things that can abide the fire come through it purified; but some that are tested perish in the flames. The fierce fire so scorched, its flames so shrivelled her soul, that Clare felt there would be nothing worth while left to come

through. Yet she had to endure. She had to see a love which had been so wonderful replaced by a blind self-centeredness; trust by suspicion; consideration by neglect. Then with a courageous effort she looked away to the past; from ugliness to beauty, from antagonism to love. She knew the good to be the true; she would keep her faith, and strengthen her vision of the Real.

But on the fifth day she met Iva Tempest, and the vision was shattered again.

Clare was going up to town by train to do some household shopping. She was on the platform, looking for an empty carriage, when a lovely face appeared at an open window, and a friendly voice called to her.

“Mrs. Royce! It’s ages since I saw you! Come in with me, will you?”

Iva opened the door, and Clare got in and sat beside her, though she would have given much to be left alone. Iva’s brief glance was keen and critical, then she kindly looked away.

“How quickly she’s gone off!” she thought. “She’s really plain. How terribly ill she looks! Her hair isn’t bad, but—no animation—no complexion; nothing but eyes! What a good thing her husband’s not keen on beauty.”

Clare courageously began to talk of the shopping that she was going to do. For two minutes her efforts were successful. Then she discovered that she had no more to say; she had reached the end of her thoughts and strength. But that did not really matter. Iva continued chatting easily.

“It’s a good thing that Harry lets me have my own way, isn’t it?” she was saying, when Clare had marshalled her faculties sufficiently to enable her to listen. “It makes things

so much jollier. Of course I'm extravagant. I'm going to see some furs now. They're an awful price, but Harry's meeting me at Victoria. They're to be his present. He's very fond of me."

Clare looked at the beautiful complexion, the glorious hair, the pale eyes which were redeemed by the darker brows and lashes. How lovely Iva was!

"Of course," she said, remotely, without envy. She knew Harry Tempest: the thought of his "fondness" did not appeal to her.

"He's just the right sort of husband for me," Iva went on lightly. "I should have quarrelled with a masterful one."

"Would you?"

Clare was looking out of the window at the stark trees whose once living leaves lay shrivelled at their feet. She was not at all interested in her companion's possible husbands. Iva studied the listless figure critically. She did not mean to hurt her, but she had always been curious to know how much Clare knew of the past. Now she succumbed to the temptation to find out.

"I shouldn't have suited your husband at all," she remarked, with a self-conscious laugh.

Clare started. She turned from the bare trees with a flush on her cheeks, a questioning light in her eyes.

"She doesn't know," thought Iva. "Just like a man! I suppose he told her that she was the first."

"What do you mean?" Clare asked quickly.

"Oh—only what I said; I shouldn't have suited Martyn. Didn't you know that we were engaged once?"



“You were engaged to Martyn!” Clare exclaimed incredulously.

“Not for long—certainly. We—well—I suppose we quarrelled.... He’s a very easy person to quarrel with.”

Clare looked at the lovely face—with its soulless eyes and careless smile. It was not jealousy that she felt.

“Is he?” she challenged, perfect self-control being beyond her strength.

“Haven’t you found that out yet?” Iva suggested lightly. “He was furious because Wilfred Cavendish kissed me. Wilfred was a nice boy. He’d just come back from the States. It wasn’t as if he was a stranger. He’d known me for years. But Martyn nearly killed him. They’ve hated each other ever since.”

“I wonder why you told me,” Clare said slowly, feeling as if she were being suffocated.

“Oh, you don’t mind, do you? We got over it long ago. But it’s just as well to know things, isn’t it? I know all Harry’s secrets.... You’re not likely to upset Martyn!” and perhaps Iva’s glance was not wholly generous, as it rested on Clare’s thin cheeks. “Of course his wife would always be safe. It’s only when he wants to get rid of anyone, that he sends his scruples to the winds—and the other one can only make the best of it!”

“You are maligning him!” Clare said hotly—defying her aching heart. “But of course you don’t really know him,” she added quietly.... “I hope you’ll be successful with your furs,” she said, with a wintry smile, as the train slowed down at Victoria. “No, thank you; I’m going the other way. Good-bye.”

There was no thought of shopping now. The meeting with Iva had shattered her visions—giving her another view of Martyn, which Memory was working to confirm.

Clare looked at beautiful things in shop windows—seeing none of them. Memory had taken her back to a star-lit night—a closed carriage—herself alone with Martyn.

“If a man’s straight, I stick to him. If he isn’t, I tell him what I think of him, and that’s the end. It’s the same with a woman.”

“You don’t allow for mistakes?”

“No.... I never take a thing back.”

Never take a thing back! That was what his mother had told her. Iva had implied it. Wilfred had experienced it.

The long, long years stretched dark and desolate before Clare’s aching eyes.

Once again there descended upon her a pitiful fear of life. The only thing that she felt she could face courageously was the thick-set hedge which guarded the Unseen. How could she get through? How?... Perhaps the great shock had weakened her moral fibre. Perhaps she was not wholly sane. She walked on pondering—How? How get through without injuring Martyn. How?

Suddenly she remembered Gavin Ogilvie. If anyone in the world could help her, he could. He was called a “healer” and he was her husband’s friend. She had thought of him as a “rock”—if he failed her, she would not go on living. But first....

She was not sure of his address. She went to the nearest Post Office and looked it up in the directory. Then she walked on until she found the house.

A lady opened the door as if she expected visitors. Clare hesitated on the threshold. Yes, Mr. Ogilvie was in. Had she come to the meeting? No, Clare did not know that there was a meeting. Could she speak to him for a minute?

He came out to her—kind, strong, magnetic. The clasp of his hand told of healing.

“I wanted to see you,” Clare told him without ceremony. “Have you any time to spare? I can come back again if you will let me.”

“I have a class on now.” He consulted his diary. “Come back at three o’clock,” he said, without questioning. “I can give you half-an-hour.”

He shook her hand again and opened the door, and Clare passed out into the street.... For a few hours longer she need not question—How?

Her strength was almost spent, yet she walked—for she could not be still. Perhaps when her strength gave out she might be able to rest—as the broken terrier had ceased to suffer once he had ceased to move. The park was gay with finely dressed women, bright with the sound of voices and laughter. But Clare noticed nothing. Her world had crashed.

Punctually to the minute she returned to Gavin Ogilvie’s. He opened the door himself. He showed her into the room which had seen many miracles wrought, then for a few minutes he left her alone.

A bright fire was burning in the open grate. A pictured head of the Christ hung in the centre of the wall opposite the fire, and around the room were simple, colored representations of psychic visions. A bowl of yellow chrysanthemums made a brilliant spot of color on a small table. The atmosphere of the room was peace.

Clare sank down into a basket chair and leaned her head against the cushion. At last her strength was spent. She could go on no more. Might she not rest? She closed her eyes, too tired to try and keep up appearances any longer. She heard the healer come in and close the door behind him. She barely opened her eyes. She could not sit upright. Her strength had gone. He crossed the room, lowered the blind to the centre of the window, then sat down in a chair on the other side of the fire and looked across at her.

“Well, what’s the trouble?” he asked directly, and his tone carried confidence.

“I’ve had a shock,” she said in a voice that had lost its verve. “I hoped that I shouldn’t have to go on living. Now it seems as if I must. If I must, I want to do it decently. I’ve come to ask you to help me.”

“Take off your hat and coat,” he said in practical tones. “You’ll be more comfortable. I’ve got no one coming till half past four.”

Clare obeyed him. He moved her chair to the front of the fire, placed a pillow at her back, then drew his own chair to the side of hers and sat down facing her. She leaned back exhausted, her hands lying limply in her lap.

“I’m so tired,” she said weakly.

“Well, just rest then,” and he took her hands in his and held them fast, while Clare sat with closed eyes—hoping nothing—willing nothing—longing only to rest.

But—a miracle was being wrought! She opened her eyes again—wonder dawning in them. Already strength was returning—life was flowing from the healer to her. Yes, surely, a miracle was being wrought!

“Well, what is the trouble?” he asked again—his hands on her wrists.

Then she told him; told him all, knowing that he would understand—knowing that he was to be trusted; told him too—without disguise—that she had been tempted to take her own life.

“One thing that prevented me was the fear that I should bungle it,” she said, with a shaky laugh.

He showed no surprise. “Ah, that would be a great mistake,” he said simply. “I’ve seen enough of what happens on the other side to know that suicide is a very uncomfortable process.”

He rose and stood at the back of her chair. For a minute his fingers were pressed against her eyes ... the throbbing ache went out of them—she felt that they were healed. Then slowly his hands—strong, capable, healing—passed over her body, until every faculty was renewed—every power restored.

“You will be able to ‘do it decently’ as you call it, now,” he said after a little while, and his voice tossed the foam-flakes from life’s deeps. “You have plenty of vitality in you to go on with.”

He sat down facing her and put his hand again on hers. “Just close your eyes and rest a bit longer,” he said.

Clare closed her eyes, and kept them closed, while new life flowed into her being. Gavin’s words came to her with the force of certain conviction.

“You are God’s child,” he was saying simply. “God is Love. That Love is all round about you and in you so nothing evil can really touch you. Don’t forget that. The Love of God

is your life. Nothing can harm you.... He is God's child too—the child of that same great Love—so he too must find the good.... We wander away, we sometimes forget, and then we suffer; but we have to come home at last. The children have to come back to their Father.”

Clare opened her eyes. She saw that his were closed; his body still; his face illumined. She dropped her lids again with a feeling of peaceful security....

“Love is taking care of you both—be sure of that—and Love will triumph. Forget that ugly thing you saw. That was not the man you loved! Remember the times when you have seen the soul shining in his eyes.”

“Those were wonderful times!” thought Clare. “But how did you know?” A tender smile broke the firmness of her mouth. What wonderful times those had been!

“That was the real man. It was the God in him you loved.... Don't forget—Love watches between you, so all must be well. When Martyn seems so far away, just say to yourself —‘Love watches.’ ”

He took his hands from hers, and there was a moment's silence.

“You married a man with tremendous possibilities,” he said after a pause, looking steadily at Clare. “Because he can be great he can be small. Just because the soil can produce such flowers, unnoticed weeds may come up rank.”

Clare's eyes met his. “And you remember,” she said proudly, “the best of the flowers were mine. I ought not to grumble.”

“If only you could know what was at the back of it all,” he said slowly, “you might understand. We cannot tell what he

may have been suffering. If we could, we should not judge hardly.”

“I tell myself that,” Clare said simply, “and I don’t judge.”

“Why, of course you love him still!” he exclaimed, with a very human laugh in his voice. “Go on loving him! It is just the thing he needs.... Now lie down and rest for a little while, and I’ll get some tea.”

He put some cushions on the long covered seat against the wall, and Clare lay down obediently. How wonderful it was to feel strong again. Yet it was good to rest.

In a few minutes Gavin returned with a laden tray, and a cloth over his arm. Clare raised her head.

“You rest! I can manage,” he said.

But Clare sprang up and came to the table. She took the cloth from his arm.

“Don’t you remember,” she said—and her voice thrilled with new life—“ ‘He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered unto them?’ ”

His face was bright. “Come along then!” he said happily, and they laid the table together....

At last Clare got ready to go. As she took up her gloves, she looked at her beautiful ring—the ring that Martyn had given her in Pam’s garden, while around them the summer glory was passing, the crimson leaves were beginning to fall, yet for the lovers the world was being made anew.

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls” she quoted. “I had thought this my gate to Paradise.”

“And why not?” Gavin said quickly. “You know that a pearl is the result of suffering. The old apocalyptic vision holds more than we have yet discovered. Each man’s gate to

Paradise is made out of something which the world calls evil, which has penetrated his life and threatened to wear his soul with ceaseless pain, but which has been transmuted by patient courage and faith into his most precious possession—his pearl of great price.”

“So the thought was true after all?” she suggested wistfully.

“Never doubt it!” he responded emphatically.

“And I’m not to get out of living?”

“Don’t let me hear that suggestion again,” he enjoined, with an understanding smile, as he opened the door.

Clare went down the steps with lightened tread.

She knew no weariness now, no despair, no desolation. Love was warm around her. His healing had renewed her body. With light step, and head erect, she trod the miles that led back to her home—a song of praise in her heart, her face lifted sunwards. The earth still rocked beneath her feet, but she could sing again—because she knew she had wings.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### *THE GRAY OF DESOLATION*

CLARE and Martyn were at breakfast. Martyn was apparently deep in his paper. Clare looked at his grim face and wondered, with a catch in her throat, when she should see him smile again; wondered how long it would be before she saw the love-light in his eyes, before she felt the tenderness of his "Well, little one." Love was stronger than death, and love must win; but it seemed to Clare that their battle-ground was already red with blood.

She opened the letter from Jim that lay by her plate, and her lips smiled. Martyn, glancing up, saw and wondered. He was in no mood for smiles. He jerked over the page of his paper tetchily, and propped it against the toast rack.

Clare read:

Dear, It's such a long, long time since I saw you so I am writing you a letter. You must excuse the writing but I'm a bit shaky still—they've been keeping me in bed. I am writing to tell you what I'm going to do. I hope you won't mind. I want to see you so much so I have told Painton to have the car sent along in the morning after you get this, and if Reynolds doesn't bring you back in it Painton is going to tell him he is dismissed at once. You won't let Reynolds be dismissed, will you? He will come for you at eleven, and he will take you safely home at night.

Wilf has been away a long time. I got so worried—though I didn't let La Belle know. But it's all right now. He went to Scotland and got snowed up. I wish we could get snowed up tomorrow when you come, but no such luck, I expect. He

wasn't well so the lady, Mrs. McKerrow, wrote a four-page letter to tell me how sorry she was and I sent her a letter back.

Doctor came yesterday and said I oughtn't to risk school yet. He thinks I may be all right when I'm older as I'm not likely to be laid up except when performing some of my mad antics. I suppose he thinks I shall be sober when I'm old. I feel much better, at times quite well, but I find my temper somewhat trying. Not that I've developed a dangerous one, so don't be afraid to come. I'm not behind in Arithmetic now, and I got full marks last time for Geometry.

I've been trying to teach La Belle to sing, she could sing jolly well if she practiced though she says she's too old. I tried to persuade her to join the altos in the choir. I'm sure she's better than some of the ladies there, only I'm afraid if she got to a rather high note she would call out "It's too high," instead of singing it. She did that at first with me, but I got her to sing it after a bit and she did jolly well. Painton said the sermon on Sunday was fine. I was sorry I missed it. And the football match on Saturday too.

I'm wanting to see you awfully. You don't mind me telling you that you are much prettier than anyone else I know, do you? And that's saying a lot since I know the Honorable Iva Tempest. Martyn doesn't mind, does he? I told him but I expect he didn't repeat it.

Buck up and come and see me. Martyn will spare you, won't he? Give him my best love and tell him while you are on the way to me my spirit shall be reserved for him so that he shan't be lonely.

I have written a newsy, not a love-letter, as I know you will like it better. In fact I don't believe I could write a love-letter

to you or anyone else, but I send you heaps of love.

From,  
Jim.

Clare read it through again, and the smile deepened. She looked up at Martyn and the smile died. How could she share it with him—the letter of the brave boy they both loved? “Martyn doesn’t mind, does he?” Oh, no, Martyn would not mind anything now. “Much prettier than anyone else I know.” Clare knew that she was not pretty now: she wondered whether Jim would see. She wanted to tell Martyn about the letter, but the words would not come. Before she could speak he took up his paper and left the room.

Her lips trembled. She finished her coffee, but the hand that held the cup was shaking.

She was crossing the hall when a double postman’s knock sounded at the door. Clare answered it herself. She took the registered parcel, signed for it, then, after a moment’s hesitation, went into the study to give it to Martyn.

He looked impatiently from his writing.

“A parcel for you,” she said quietly.

“Thank you. You may leave it on the table.”

He turned back to his writing. She hesitated.

“I’ve had a letter from Jim,” she began.

“Yes?” he said.

“He wants me to go over for the day. He’s sending the car.”

“Of course you will go?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Why not?”

She looked at him.

“He sends his best love to you,” she said with a smile.

“Oh,” indifferently—unsmiling.

“Shall I leave you the letter?”

“I’m busy now.”

“You can give it me back tonight.”

“Tonight.... That reminds me—I shall be gone, I expect, before you return.”

The blood seemed to leave her heart, but she faced him steadily. He had risen—as she was standing—but he did not look at her. He was playing with his pen.

“I’ve promised Foster to go over to Italy with him,” he said in a level voice.

Clare fought for calm. “For long?” she asked steadily.

“I can’t say. A few weeks, I expect.”

She was longing to say that she would not go to see Jim; longing to tell him he must not leave her like that; longing to show him that he was all the world to her, and her world was Love. But she looked at his face and she knew that it would be useless. So she only said quietly:

“I will put your things ready before I go.”

“Don’t trouble,” he said politely. “I can manage.”

She put the letter down on the table, and went out of the room, afraid that she would break down if she stayed.

“Don’t trouble!” she repeated with a trembling laugh, as she busied herself with packing. “Don’t trouble! Oh, Martyn, Martyn, where has your understanding gone?”

A tear fell on the socks that she was folding—only one tear, for Clare was not given to crying....

When he was alone Martyn took up the parcel. He cut the string sharply and ripped off the brown paper. For a moment he looked at what lay beneath—uncomprehending—indifferent; then he took up his pen and finished the letter he had been writing when Clare came in. He sealed and stamped it, then looked at the parcel again, beginning to realise.

It was the manuscript that Wilfred had taken.

He glanced through the pages. Yes, it was complete, except for the title page; the title page which had been sent to him before, with the box of burnt ashes. So he had not lost his book after all! With a strange indifference Martyn realised that Wilfred had only wanted to hurt not to injure him. He had hit back when chance put temptation in his way, but he would never have destroyed anything that was the work of the man he had once loved. In his pain he sought to retaliate, but his madness had a limit—he had thought only to wound.

Was it possible that—but a few weeks before—the loss of that manuscript had meant so much to Martyn? His anger had been so hot, that both Lord Alwyn and Morton Hillier—who believed him to be basely wronged—were tempted to pity the culprit should he fall into Martyn's hands. And now ... the book was returned—it was not destroyed after all—and Martyn did not care.

He looked beyond the window with unseeing eyes. The wind was rustling through the fading leaves, the grass was strewn with leaves that had fallen. The bared branches were letting in the wider view of the park; and above the green, leaf-strewn slopes the sky stretched gray and heavy. Only one tiny patch of blue was visible, and Martyn did not see it. He saw nothing but gray desolation.

Then for a few minutes the sun broke through the clouds and shone against that patch of blue; just for a few minutes the light triumphed. It came through the window on to the table, and lay—a bar of gold—on the letter Clare had left. Martyn looked at the words that the sunlight brightened. He read them subconsciously.

“Martyn will spare you—won’t he? Give him my best love and tell him while you are on the way to me my spirit shall be reserved for him, so that he shan’t be lonely.”

He read them again and his mouth twitched.

“So that he shan’t be lonely!”

Not lonely! Would the loneliness ever lessen its maddening torture? No: that were hardly possible.

He read the letter through, while the sunlight brightened it. Then the sun disappeared, the clouds triumphed, and over all spread the gray desolation. He put the letter in his pocket. Clare did not find it when she returned that night.

He took up the manuscript again, but he did not look into it. He doubled the brown paper carelessly round it, then locked it away in a drawer. He could not be interested in it now. But Wilfred must still be made to pay. The return of the manuscript—or his own indifference to it—did not alter that fact. Wilfred must still pay. It would be a comfort to thrash somebody!

Clare prepared for Martyn’s departure as far as she was able, but she could not ask him what he would want; he would only say again—“Don’t trouble.”

Could feelings and thoughts leave their impress on material things? Clare believed that they could. Love was folded into each garment she handled; a blessing was

enclosed in every article she touched. The love—the blessing—must reach him, though for a little while he might be blind and deaf to their message.

She stood looking at a folded coat lying on his bed. Suddenly she knelt down and laid her cheek against the empty sleeve, while a tearless sob mastered her. The sunlight—triumphing over the clouds—rested for a moment on her bowed head. When she rose to her feet a bar of light lay on the sleeve her cheek had pressed—as it lay on Jim’s letter in the room below. She patted the sunlit sleeve with a murmured—“Bless you!” and a little crooked smile; then she went away to her own room to get ready, for the car was waiting at the gate.

She was going to Jim—alone. Martyn was leaving her. He would go without a farewell, if she would let him.

At the foot of the stairs she paused; then she opened the study door, her heart beating fast.

“Good-bye, Martyn,” she said quietly, going over to his desk.

He rose. “Good-bye,” he said remotely, not meeting her eyes.

He crossed the room, went through the hall and opened the front door for her. She looked up at him.

“You will write?” she asked.

“Oh yes, you shall have a line,” he replied at once. “Good-bye.”

She went down the steps alone.

He waited until the car started; then he went back to his empty study, and the gray desolation....

Did the men and women of old—who were healed with a wonderful healing—ever suffer again? Clare wondered. Did the demons ever return to the bodies from which the word of power had exorcised them? Did the men to whom sight had been restored ever get plunged into darkness again? History did not tell her. She thought of the distracted disciples on the storm-tossed lake. In imagination she heard the word of power that stilled the storm, bringing “a great calm”—a calm to the depths. At the command of their Lord, boisterous winds fell away into silence, troubled waters became still. In that last, Clare knew, lay the miracle. Wind may drop—be still—suddenly, but not water.

Martyn had once told her of his worst experience on the sea. A blue sky stretched overhead; the air was still. But there had been a terrific storm in that place eight days before, and beneath an unruffled surface surged its troubled aftermath; the calm had not reached to the depths.

As Clare drove towards Jim she thought of that storm. Then a sentence she had lately read came back to her. She repeated it to herself with a crooked smile:

“Etna is again quiescent and its summit is covered with snow.”

Snow-covered—but the volcanic fires still smouldered within. The wind had dropped, and over the troubled waters had come a wonderful stillness; but deep below the surface the swell of the storm remained....

It was good to see Jim again; how good Clare realised more as the day passed in his company. He was on the couch in the large oak-panelled hall, waiting to receive her when she arrived. He was very pale, but supremely happy and



triumphant that she had come. The hours were all too short for him, for he had so much to watch—so much to say.

They discussed the Prime Minister's great speech. Jim gave his views on Free Trade and preferential tariffs. He gave her a graphic description of the last football match he had watched, which "was grand," and the last sermon he had heard, which "wasn't much good." He explained some of the characteristics of rigid, non-rigid, and semi-rigid airships; and all the while he was watching Clare's face, and trying to bring back the light to the eyes that were now so sad.

Then he talked of Martyn; talked of him with a glowing, boyish enthusiasm which warmed Clare's aching heart. She knew love's sight is truest, and so Jim saw the real. Iva—his mother—the men who would have injured him had they dared—none of them saw Martyn truly, for none of them truly loved him.

"Isn't he a wonderful man!" Jim cried.

"Yes—a wonderful man!" said Clare, bravely echoing his tones.

"One day when I was staying with you, and I was alone upstairs, I heard Martyn. I think he was looking for you. He came flying up—singing as he came. I couldn't help it—I thought: 'The voice of my beloved! Behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.' "

He suddenly blushed rosy red. "Oh—do you think I'm silly?" he said shyly.

"I think you're just a darling!" Clare answered, her eyes shining.

It was after tea that they had the talk that penetrated the veil of mysteries.

Painton had placed the biggest and softest of the chairs by the fire for Clare; close to the couch on which Jim lay. The French window was open on to the sundial garden, and the sound of fresh falling rain and dripping leaves made the cosiness within the more inviting. Fritz, who had been for a solitary ramble, and had returned very wet, and had been lectured and dried by Mrs. Painton, lay in blissful content on the rug; only rising now and then to push his shaggy head under Jim's hand to remind him that he was there. The fire was built up with great logs. Its light flickered around the hall, which was otherwise in darkness. The old oak fireplace and chimney-piece were beautiful in the wavering light.

"I've been wanting to ask you something," Jim said at length, quite simply—his eyes on the fire. "I want you to tell me just how we come here."

"Into this world?" asked Clare simply.

"Yes," he said. "It's so stupid not to understand. The other day, before I was laid up, I was passing a cottage, and I heard a woman crying out. I thought she must be ill. Then I saw a nurse go in. In the evening I heard Painton telling La Belle there was a new baby in that cottage, and I heard him say that the mother had had a very bad time. I wouldn't ask La Belle about it. I wanted you to tell me."

"Thank you, Jim dear," and Clare laid her hand for a moment on his thick tumbled hair.

It seemed very strange how much this child knew—and how little. He could discuss—with keenness and understanding—a stiff speech of a politician; he could describe accurately and interestingly the intricacies of machinery; he had very strong opinions, backed by very forcible arguments, on such a difficult subject as the doctrine

of predestination; he knew something of the wonders of the Seven Stars and Orion; but of the origin of life he knew nothing. He had come to Clare, that she might tell him.

For a few minutes she was silent. What a big thing Jim had asked! How could she find true words to tell of the primal force of worlds? Clare had looked on love as it was before man spoiled it; love as it was when nature was chaste; love as great lovers have found it in every age: a thing of flame and wonder, yet a splendour for life's everydays: a force flashing beauty from star and rock and tree: a passion bringing splendid joy to nature and to man.

Jim knew nothing of love's creative power. He knew its early ecstasy in a wondering awe of the stars; he knew it in his friendships; he knew it in his shy devotion to the Lover of the Ages—the Majestic Great-hearted Christ.

So he would be able to see, in his measure, as Clare saw. Through love's absence Clare had learned even more of love's splendour. Could she show that to Jim?

She tried. Nature has veiled her most sacred places. Clare approached them with reverence. She told Jim of the love which wakens nature to a fresh effulgent beauty. She told him of the plan—spoiled a thousand, a million times—yet essentially splendid, on which families and homes are built. She told him of the germ of life; of union which alone can make that life the genesis of lives. She told of the mysterious growth of the unborn child. She told of the joy for which the mother “forgetteth straight the pain” of her travail.

“Every child should be a creation of love, Jim. Through great lovers a child comes into a wonderful world; and he should be a wonderful child.”

Jim did not move. He was thinking.

“I’m so glad you’ve told me,” he said, after a few minutes. “I felt a duffer not to understand, but I wouldn’t ask any of the boys.”

Then he looked at her without embarrassment. “It’s a great scheme! I hope you’ll have some children. They’d be lovely!”

Clare’s hands gripped the arms of the chair.

“Would they, darling?” she said shakily. “But I’m afraid —“.... She heard the closing door. She felt the silence and the darkness.... “One cannot have everything, you know,” she added courageously.

She stretched out her hand and took up Jim’s copy of *Fellow Farers* that lay on a small table at her side.

“This is our child. It is very beautiful. And—one can’t have everything.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### *“LOVE WATCHES”*

CLARE sat alone in her morning-room, embroidering a frock for Pam’s baby girl. The fire burned frostily; the light of the electric lamp was softened by a crimson shade. In a bowl on the round gate-legged table was Lambert’s proud contribution from the greenhouse—a free cluster of lovely chrysanthemums, with graceful feathery petals of delicate sea-shell tints.

No other room would ever possess the charm that had belonged to Martyn’s study; but Martyn was away, and his room had become the haunt of torturing memories, so Clare was bringing into her morning-room fresh homeliness and beauty.

Martyn had told her once, “Work—if possible for others—but anyway work—is the only thing that makes the loneliness bearable.” Clare had looked for work—for others—and she had found it. Lady Alwyn, that busy doer of good deeds, had for a secretary a young and pretty girl who had been invaluable to her, but now seemed to be failing in health. Lady Alwyn did not know how she could fill her place satisfactorily if she gave her a holiday, for they were busy organizing a big Health Crusade. Clare volunteered to help. She knew a good many of Lady Alwyn’s plans, and she was an even more capable worker than the pretty girl who was so valuable. The little secretary went away to get strong, and Clare worked diligently through an eight-hour day, and tried to put her heart into her work.

At night she returned home very tired; to work again—for the children that she loved....

The front door bell rang. Clare looked up from her embroidery. It could not be Martyn, for Martyn had his key.

Alice came in. "Mr. Hillier, ma'am." And Morton entered without further ceremony.

"I'm not intruding, I hope?" he suggested, painfully conscious of their last meeting.

Clare put down her work and held out her hand. Her cheeks flushed.

"I'm very glad to see you," she said truthfully. "Come and take this other chair, and make yourself comfortable."

"You don't mind if I smoke?" he asked, feeling that a cigarette would help him.

"I shall be pleased. It was nice of you to come."

She leaned back in her chair and rested her hands listlessly in her lap. Morton studied her attentively through the faint smoke-cloud, as he had studied her once before with very different thoughts. He was more charitable to her than she was to herself, and he was not thinking her plain, but the change in her made him feel fierce. He remembered the evening he had found her in Janet's poor little sitting room, when the radiance about her awed him, and happiness made her beautiful.

"You haven't taken to smoking yet?" he suggested—the cigarette between his fingers.

She shook her head with a slight smile.

"I can't quite imagine you," he admitted. "But it's rather soothing."

He began to talk, with apparent carelessness, of things that did not matter, and Clare seconded his efforts valiantly. Morton—like Jim—would give her what he could. She was rich in her friends. Presently he made a suggestion.

“It’s so long since you came to see us, Clare. You know how welcome you always are. Won’t you come along and have a day with Pam and the children?”

Clare looked across at him, and Morton wished that he had someone to fight.

“Does Pam know?” she asked painfully, after a brief hesitation.

“Not a word!” he said emphatically, flicking ash into the fire. “There are some things a man has no right to talk about, even to his wife.”

“Then I’ll come,” she promised. “I will come tomorrow.”

He hesitated; then—“Is it any better?” he asked quietly.

“No,” she admitted.... “Only—I can bear it better; and ... one day ... it will come right.”

“Do you know, I’m sure it’s nothing but faith will bring you through. It’s funny for me to talk, when I have none; but I know what it’s worth, and you have it.”

“You’re a good friend, Morton!”

As she looked into the fire he dared to study her again, noting the changes that pain had wrought. He thought angrily of that unforgettable morning. Clare! How very nearly tragedy touched comedy.

“Clare, couldn’t you—” He hesitated awkwardly.... “It sounds insulting but—couldn’t you—don’t you think you could—explain?”

She looked up, and her lips quivered.

“Explain! It sounds quite simple, doesn’t it? Yet if I tried to begin I should choke.”

“But if.... I know it shouldn’t be necessary. But—”

“No; it shouldn’t. But if I could, it would be no good. You can’t get truth undistorted along a twisted brain, Morton; and Martyn’s is twisted just now. He is not normal.”

She looked back into the fire and was silent for some moments. Then she turned again.

“No proofs could prove—to him. Only love could do that. But I have no proofs.... I went—with the woman he saw—to see her dear old mother who had asked for me. I do not even know where I went—the address, I mean. If I could find out, it would not help.... I never noticed that man. She said he was her husband. He only spoke to her for a moment. I think she was angry....” A hot colour flooded her cheeks.... “I ... kissed that woman, Morton. I was so sorry for her.... But I never expected to be put beside her.... Perhaps I was not good enough to kiss her—really.... Perhaps I am a Pharisee at heart....”

Morton could find no words. These were thoughts beyond his understanding.

She turned away, and they were both silent for a little while, then she said slowly:

“Of course Martyn doesn’t believe what he said. I think he doesn’t know what he said.... Only—for him ... the glory has gone.”

Suddenly she flashed round. “You’re hurting, Morton!”

“I’m sorry, Clare. I didn’t say anything.”

“But I felt it.”



“I’m sorry,” he said again. But he did not imagine that he could change his thought. He was surprised that she faced it.

“You’re thinking Martyn a cad,” she said, looking at him steadily.

Morton did not correct her, although she had omitted his adjective.

“Mr. Ogilvie says that if we bring out the thing that frightens us and consider it squarely, the danger is taken out of it. We’ll do it once, because—because it’s no good pretending that you don’t know. Then we won’t talk of it again.” ...

“You think him a cad,” she went on quietly, “and you think that your thought is inevitable. The facts are ugly, and you think only of those facts.... Suppose I did that! I should say—‘That man was a cad. He thought me vile’.” For a moment her voice quivered. “ ‘I cannot live with that thought—with the man who has such a mind’.”

She paused—her eyes turned away from Morton.

“That’s one way of looking at it—the way you’ve been looking—and a way that hurts me terribly. But it isn’t the only way, and I want you to see.... I have had what few have. I had love at its best and highest. I was proud of that.... I had more than many women—so I pay more. That’s fair!” She looked at Morton bravely,

“Eh, I paid the fiddler, sirs,  
But the dance was fine!”

Her voice challenged defeat.

Then she looked back into the heart of the fire.

“It isn’t that I’m good, or forgiving, or forbearing, or anything like that!” she said with sudden passion. “If I could take that one big blunder and say—‘That was the real man. That is what his mind is like. I have only just found him out,’ and forget the rich treasures I received from him before—then, Morton, I should deserve all the contempt that you could feel.... The other—the good—was the real, and I know it. If I judged by the evil and forgot the good I should be a traitor to the wonderful love that has been—” She hesitated; then in a flash she added, defying despair, “that is mine.”

Morton did not speak. For once he realized the futility of forceful adjectives.

“I don’t know quite how to put the rest,” she went on slowly, after a pause, “yet it is the most important of all.... You see, before I knew Martyn—some time before—religion and all that it stands for was everything to me. Just before he came I was in darkness. I had suffered so much that I was too tired to open my eyes. Then he came....”

Morton did not need to ask—did she love him still?

“He came. He brought light and ... I saw him in a place of God.... He knew so much that I didn’t know. I kept back precious things that I knew—things that he hadn’t found. He was so far above me, but ... he had missed some treasures in his climbing. I let mine go too, while I tried to follow him. Now we go down into the darkness together ... *together*, Morton. One day we shall find the light once more—*together*.... That is the heart of atonement.”

She turned to him again, with a smile shining through tears. “That is the other way of looking at it!”

And that was the way Clare kept....

Christmas came, but Martyn was still away. Jim stayed with Clare for a week, and they had many visitors, and many delights; yet Clare was thankful that she was again alone when Martyn returned. Together they could not have hidden their tragedy from Jim's quick sympathy. The Martyn who returned from Italy, thin and sunburnt, was a caricature of the lover of a year ago. The blessings that Clare had wrapped up the morning that he left her seemed to have missed their goal.

It was incredible that he could still be blind; but Clare was learning that incredible things may be: she would never again say that anything was impossible. Martyn had once told her of a criticism of his earliest published story that had ridiculed one of its minor incidents. "And that was the only bit in the story that was absolutely true." Clare knew now that the impossible is always possible; the unexpected the thing that one may at any time expect.

For months Martyn had lived in imagination with vice and rapine and hate. Now his imagination was distorted; his reason dulled.... The long, long years stretched dark and desolate before his aching eyes....

Lady Alwyn's secretary had recovered, and Clare had returned to her homely ways. She realized that Martyn did not understand her agony. She hardly realized that his own was more deep and torturing, searing his soul.

One afternoon she received a letter from Lady Alwyn, asking her help in another Health Crusade, in the Midlands. Lady Alwyn knew the value of Clare's work, and she did not hesitate to suggest that Clare should spend herself. Surely a husband would not hinder if a Cause needed her!

Clare was putting the letter carelessly on one side without thinking of giving it a second thought, when Martyn came

into the morning-room.

“From Lady Alwyn?” he asked, glancing at it.

Clare assented with surprise.

“I saw her yesterday. She said that she was going to write to you.” He stood with his back towards her, and broke a large lump of coal with his foot. “I told her I was sure that you would go.”

Clare unfolded the letter again, and looked at the lines through a mist that dimmed them.

“I had not thought of going,” she said quietly.

“Why not? I should think it’s the best thing you could do.” Clare was getting used to that cold voice now. “You will find it interesting.”

“You think I should say yes?”

“Certainly.”

He stooped to pick up the piece of coal which his energy had sent to the rug, and to Clare it seemed that he was saying —

“I can’t turn you out again, but—why don’t you go!”

She turned over the closely written sheets.

“Yes—it will be interesting,” she agreed steadily. “I think you’re right.”

She put the letter back in its envelope, and went slowly upstairs to her room.

It seemed bitterly cold. Clare found that she was shivering. She struck a match and set light to the fire. Then dropped into a chair by the window overlooking the scene she loved. A thick white frost lay on the grassy slopes beyond the garden. The sun was just disappearing behind the leafless trees before

a trail of crimson glory. The glory disappeared, leaving the empty sky cold—remote—pitiless. Dark clouds loomed on the horizon, Clare watched them vaguely. She was shivering again. She crossed the room and knelt down by the fire, trying to get warm. The flames leaped up, making a cheerful glow.

She thought that she had drained the poison cup on that day when she walked wearily the long, long miles in the sunshine, while the only courage she possessed was courage to break through the thick-set hedge which guards the Unseen. Now she found her portion was not finished. She had not yet drunk to the dregs.

She must go, and she must never come back; it was the only course left to her. Should she tell Martyn? She could not do that. What had he said that night in Pam's garden? She could feel his hand on her hair now. "Of course, little one, we never do want to go when the door is open." She could not tell him. They must drift. Other husbands and wives did that, and did not think it tragedy.

She left the fire, and went back to the window.

The clouds had disappeared. The sky was clear; cold and blue above the white tree-decked slopes. How Clare loved her home! How she loved that view—at dawn, at noon, at sunset, or beneath the stars. Now she was leaving it. Perhaps she should never come back. Martyn wanted to see her no more. If he really wanted that, then she must go—and she must not return.

Oh, the pitiless coldness of that clear, empty sky! Clare was alone in the silence, fighting her fears. The short twilight passed, but she did not move. The fire flames sank into a steady glow. The room grew dark.... Presently, ruthfully

breaking up the darkness, the shadow of the window-frame was set in a pool of pearly light. There was no moon. Clare's tired eyes were caught by the strange soft light and shadow lying on the white bedspread. She looked up towards the dark night sky. Out on its empty vastness it had sent its brightest star, and Venus shone resplendent in the blue-black lone south-west.

Now star of the blue-black night, Venus would one day be the star of a new-born morning. Clare felt as if her heart were breaking, but as she looked up towards its light she remembered Gavin Ogilvie's—"Love watches."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### *NEW BEGINNINGS*

“DO sit down, Martyn!” Mrs. Mildmay said irritably. “You get on my nerves with your fidgeting.”

Martyn did not accept the invitation to “sit down,” but he stopped his restless pacing, and came and stood against his mother’s couch, and looked at her speculatively.

“Is that man ever coming back?” he demanded curtly.

Mrs. Mildmay wiped her eyes with her tiny handkerchief.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. I wish you wouldn’t speak in that tone. I think I might expect a little sympathy from you—when I feel so ill, too.”

“Do you feel ill? I’m sorry; but you know I’m not one of the soft kind, and I can’t give what I haven’t got. Do you want me to find that fellow for you?”

Mrs. Mildmay began to cry again.

“Don’t talk of him like that. I told you he doesn’t go in for letter writing. He sent me a card from Liverpool to say he had to go over to New York. He always does things that way. I never know just when he’s going or coming. He said he wouldn’t be away very long.”

The handkerchief was sodden now. With a sudden impatient movement Martyn took it out of her hands, flung it in the fender, and gave her a clean one of his own.

“I suppose he forgot you would need money?” he suggested hardly. “Look here—can’t you stop crying for a bit? I’ll do what I can for you—you ought to know that. But crying doesn’t help. Just tell me what you want.”

“Most sons wouldn’t need to be told. You don’t try to imagine what it’s like to be here all alone—when I feel so shaky too. Clare understood. She was kind. It’s wretched now she’s gone.”

Martyn clenched his teeth. He crossed impatiently to the window, and stood there for a few moments—looking out at the narrow rain-washed street; then he returned to the side of the couch—tall, dominating, emotionless.

“You understand—my wife is away,” he said, carefully explaining. “She is staying with a friend in the Midlands. They are doing some interesting work together.... It will probably take some time, and—of course—things are ... different. But if you think you’ll be more comfortable in my house ... you may come.”

“You don’t sound very cordial! Perhaps I expect too much. But it’s strange when a mother has to be apologetic to her own son.” She pushed back her hair irritably. “I suppose you mean well, and I am grateful. Yes, I will come—until my husband returns. I shall be able to take Clare’s place for a little while. You must miss her at the table, and looking after your things—and all that.... What have I said wrong now? I do wish you’d get out of that habit of swearing. I should have thought Clare would have broken you of it.... Now you’re fidgeting again. Do come and sit down. My head’s splitting.”

With a great effort Martyn gripped his control, and came and sat beside her. He was very pale; his voice was toneless.

“I’m sorry your head’s bad. I shouldn’t cry so much if I were you. Will you pack up your things tonight? I’ll send Alice to help you if you like. You can manage? Very well then. I’ll come over and fetch you in the morning, and settle



your accounts. Is that all right? There's nothing more for you to worry about, is there?"

"Except my husband—"

"Damn your husband! There—don't begin to cry again. I'll fetch you in the morning."

So Mrs. Mildmay came—to take Clare's place; and Martyn found that loneliness alone—however terrible—is infinitely preferable to loneliness with an alien.

His mother complained of his silence and unsociability; she was jealous of his work. She did not know that life had become so terrible, that once again he was trying to make his own world—a world in which she had no place.

He must keep Clare outside his thoughts; only so could he keep sane. He could not keep her outside his home if she wished to return, but his thoughts he would guard with vigilance.

He had not forgotten Wilfred. The returned manuscript lay unheeded in his drawer, but Wilfred at least he would not forget—until he had exacted penalty for the wrong that he had done.

But there were forces with which Martyn made no reckoning—unlike Gavin Ogilvie, who knew that our angels must often smile as they get their way, and all our careful schemes are set awry....

"It's Mr. Painton, sir, from Mr. Cavendish," said Alice, coming into the study one morning, where Martyn was surreptitiously polishing a cigarette case that Clare had given him.

He looked up—for a moment not understanding, then he thrust the case and cloth into a drawer and went into the hall.

The old butler's face was marked by grief.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked—his voice faltering.

"Certainly," said Martyn—wondering what had brought him. "Come in."

He made the old man sit down in his study; then he waited for him to speak. Painton did so—hesitantly.

"It's Master Jim, sir," he said. "He's very ill."

For a moment Martyn seemed to be listening to something which did not concern him at all. He could not realise.

"But he is often ill," he said quietly. "Do you mean worse?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Painton thinks there isn't a chance. She told me to come and tell you, because Master Jim is always talking about you, and all his relations are so far away."

"But I had a letter from him only a few days ago, and he was well then," Martyn said—still not comprehending. "What has happened?"

"Doctor doesn't know. It's hemorrhage—internal. We think he must have had a blow. He was playing football with his friend, and I think he must have got a kick. He won't say, and we don't worry him. It can't make any difference."

"Of course he won't say," said Martyn with sudden understanding. His face was very grave. "Is it really very bad?"

"I'm afraid so, sir," said the butler, chokingly.

"Isn't Mr. Cavendish back yet?"

"No, sir. He sent word to say he was starting. He didn't know Master Jim was ill. It's no good sending—because he's on the road."

“Have you come in the car?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I’ll come back with you.”

As the car flew along Martyn tried to understand.... So the end was near; the end that he had known could not be very far off, for the brave, bright boy they all loved. Yet not the end; not death—but birth! Birth into a larger life where Jim might find perhaps a golden harvest from his rich, brief, suffering years. Martyn believed that.... Yet the world would be poorer.... His thoughts went hungrily to Clare. Could he send? He would wait and see....

He entered Jim’s room, and he knew that he could not send. It was too late.

For a moment mad anger seemed to grip him, for this child had suffered terribly—it was written on his face. But his eyes brightened as he turned and saw his friend.

“Martyn—you dear to come!... Doctor’s just gone.”

“He is coming in to see you again this evening,” Mrs. Painton said soothingly, as she smoothed the eiderdown with hands that trembled.

“Um,” said Jim expressively. “It’s serious then.” And that was all he said to suggest that he realised.

He held out his arms.

“Martyn, come and sit down. What ages since you’ve been!” He put his arms round Martyn’s neck with a loving hug; then his strength gave out. “Tell me what you’ve been doing,” he commanded, as his arms dropped limply.

“Going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it,” said Martyn, trying to smile.

“Not you,” weakly. “It’s too jolly at home. You dear, to come! It’s almost worth the pain.”

He looked up questioningly.

“I suppose God never does give us more than we can bear,” he said. “But it’s been pretty near it.”

Martyn himself felt the pain to be unbearable, as he suffered with the child.

“But it’s better now,” Jim added bravely. “And—you’ve come.”

His breathing seemed difficult.

“Are you comfortable, laddie?” Martyn said tenderly. “Look here—can I make it better?”

He sat down at the head of the bed, put his arm under the pillow and around the thin shoulders, and drew Jim against his breast.

“That’s heaps better, Martyn,” the boy said, as he leaned his head against his friend. “You are a brick.”

Martyn brushed back the thick fair hair that was damp with the sweat of suffering. “You always were a flatterer, old man,” he said, “But I’ll agree to the hardness.”

“You old silly—it’s another sort of brick; like you gave me another sort of world,—the world, the flesh, and the devil—don’t you remember?”

Then he was quiet. He seemed to want nothing and no one else. Perhaps he was too tired to remember. He did not ask for Clare—whom he loved, or Wilfred—who so often made him anxious. Perhaps he did not realise; and—he had Martyn.

Martyn sat beside him, maddeningly helpless before the spasms of suffering, but understandingly loving. Mrs. Painton

was continually in and out of the room, but Martyn was unconscious of her presence.

He was remembering how Jim loved Clare. How his eyes had twinkled as he had said—"Now we are going to have a lovely time all to ourselves. You will be quite out of it!"

Yes—Martyn was quite out of it ... and Jim was going too. Clare would miss Jim. How she would miss him, Martyn felt that he knew.

Jim loved Clare, and Jim knew nothing but good. Martyn found it in his heart to envy the beautiful spirit that had remained untouched by falsehood; that would pass from the frail, beautiful body, still guileless—without the soil of evil.

A common soul would never have been blinded as Martyn was blinded—but a common soul would never have had Martyn's sight. A lesser man would never have hated as Martyn hated—but a lesser man could never so have loved. Now his love had only Jim ... and Jim was going.

The last time that Martyn had come to this house he had refused to wait to see Jim, because his heart was mad with anger against Wilfred, and he could not meet the clear blue eyes which did not understand the ugly passion of hate. Now, while Martyn's revenge still tarried, Wilfred's brother was passing in his arms.... As he thought of these things he looked up—to see the man he had sought with bitterness through troubled days and nights, while nature sided with his enemy and hindered his pursuit. Was Wilfred his enemy still? Martyn did not know. He knew only that his arm was round the child who was so nearly through the shadowed gateway—and Wilfred had come.

"Hullo, Wilf! So you've got back," Jim said contentedly. "I wondered how long you'd be. But Martyn's been so good to

me.”

Martyn glanced at Wilfred. They avoided meeting each other’s eyes, but Martyn was aware of the great change in the man who had been his friend. The marks of suffering were all too evident. Wilfred looked as if he were hardly out of the Region of the Shadows yet. He had not Martyn’s strength, and as he stood at his brother’s side he had to fight for his self-control.

He stooped and kissed the damp forehead. As he did so his shoulder touched Martyn’s arm. How long was it since last they two had been as near each other? Then—choking—he turned away.

Jim closed his eyes. Wilfred stood still and waited—watching with bitterness. It looked as if the child had fainted. Wilfred turned and passed heavily out of the room.

Suddenly a clear voice called him with startling energy:—  
“Wilf, old chap—where are you going? Come back!”—and Wilfred came back in answer to that imperious command.

“I thought you were asleep,” he said shakily. “I was only going to change.”

“No—don’t go. I want you both.”

Jim’s head sank again on Martyn’s shoulder, and the two men watched together.

Wilfred had made the loss of his friend a curse, and had let the curse spoil his life. Martyn had hated and refused to forgive—blind to his own power to madden. Now—in the child’s room—those things were forgotten. Jim was loving them both. They could not hate while he was loving.

The hours dragged heavily—for there was nothing to be done; nothing to be done—only to suffer. Martyn and Wilfred

who had once thought together—and dreamed together—and had hated apart, now suffered together, and in that suffering atoned.

Several times Wilfred felt that he could bear it no longer—he must run away; but after that last imperious call he could not go; not go ... while there was a possibility that he might be called back once more. Martyn kept his place—a smile in his eyes as long as Jim could see it; when he could no longer see—only pain.

Then—the end ... which is Beginning....

Wilfred suddenly broke down. Martyn's jaw was grim, but with infinite gentleness he closed the eyes that would look into his no more on earth, and rested his hand for a moment lingeringly on the fair hair.

Martyn and Wilfred were alone together—alone with the spirit-presence of the child who had loved them both. The beautiful soul that had dwelt in the beautiful fragile body had passed from it—beyond the shadow of their night—for it had done its work. Its radiant love had conquered.

As they looked at each other, hate—that had dominated through the long, long months—fell dead between them. Something—ever-living—which had lain crushed beneath its power, lifted its head once more.

Martyn took his hand from the child's fair hair and held it out to Wilfred. With a sob in his throat Wilfred caught it.

“I've been a cad,” he said unsteadily. “What a cad! I didn't realize before.”

Martyn put his arm round Wilfred's shoulders, and led him from the room.

“You mustn’t break down,” he said quietly. “You know he’d hate that.”

But Wilfred could not respond. “And I left him so long,” he faltered. “But I didn’t know. You know I didn’t know. Why has he been taken?”

“You mustn’t ask that, old man. That’s only selfishness.” But Martyn’s tone was gentle. “Don’t you see it’s much the best for him ... and he had a very happy time.”

Martyn was trying to comfort himself too.

“He was the happiest child I’ve ever known,” he added. “And he got more of the things that count into his short life than most of us may hope for in our three-score years and ten.”

It seemed impossible that in thinking of Jim one should ever look down; one must always look up—sunwards. Martyn was trying to make Wilfred look with him.

“I’m not going back tonight,” he said later. “I shan’t leave you this week. When I go, you shall come with me, and stay until you feel ready to stand on your own feet again.”

Wilfred’s lips trembled. “And you couldn’t understand that it was hell without you all this time!” he said brokenly. “Why couldn’t you understand!... But—I was a cad.”

Martyn put his arm round Wilfred’s shoulders again. His own burden seemed heavier than he could bear but he dared not tell himself that he, too, had been a cad. He had to be strong for both.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### *REMEMBERING ALONE*

CLARE sometimes wondered how much longer she could keep on. If only Gavin Ogilvie were near he would heal her again. He would take the weariness from her body, the ache from her eyes, and the pain in her heart would lessen. If only she could see Martyn, for one moment, as she had seen him in the golden days of their love, no other miracle would be needed. She would not try to forget; yesterday was her sanctuary; tomorrow must be her hope.

But now her tomorrow would be empty of Jim.

She received the news in the small Minster Town where she was staying. The letter that brought it was from Wilfred, and was very brief. Poor Wilfred! But he had found Martyn again, and before long he would grow strong. He had found Martyn! It was only she who was left alone. For a moment the sense of her desolation overwhelmed her.

But the tears that came to her eyes were not allowed to fall. She would not mourn. A strange thrill of exultation went through her. Jim was victorious!

She went quietly up to her room with her letter, and Jim seemed very near.

Her window overlooked a large garden now bordered by stark hawthorn and beech and chestnut, not yet putting forth their leaves. Clare read Wilfred's letter again, then blew out the candle—which was the only light her room possessed—and knelt down by the open window. The wild wailing wind seemed unearthly. Heavy clouds hid the sky, except at one point high in the south where the group of Pleiades clustered.

The wind seemed to reach out and enfold her, with a strength beneficent and supernatural. It lifted her to the height of vision. She reached the place of communion.

She gave thanks for Jim. She would not mourn. Like Martyn, she knew that to mourn would be selfish although the world had become so terribly the poorer. She would keep the precious things in her memory, and banish the hurtful things—which Jim had never known.

During the last long weeks Jim had been her greatest helper. She must find the Real alone now, without the inspiration of the boy hero-worshipper's, "Isn't he a wonderful man!" She must remember alone.

She must forget alone, too....

The clouds had vanished. The sky was thickly gemmed with Stars. Orion shone in beauty.... Jim was very near. Clare felt his presence—and yet ... her heart ached with longing....

Martyn was crushing his desire. He was fighting his growing longing for Clare—for to him it was infamous. It was sacrilege upon a splendid memory that he should desire the woman he no longer loved. He told himself that the thing that was tearing him now was not love, and he loathed himself for it.

He knew that he could bring Clare back if he willed. She had crossed London to come back to him at his will; she would come back to him now if he willed her, and—she was his! His pulses throbbed fiercely. She was his. He had power and right on his side. She would come, and she would stay.... Would she? No! There could be no contact without communion. They had lost the sweets of their paradise, but at least he would not grasp that poisonous Dead Sea Fruit. He fought his longing. He would not bring her back.

One day Wilfred unwittingly helped him.

They were sitting before the fire when Wilfred took three small books out of his pocket.

“They are Jim’s,” he said quietly, handing them to his friend. “I found them in one of his drawers. At first I didn’t like to look at them, but I’m very glad I did. They were a revelation.”

Martyn held out his hand and took the little note-books reverently.

“There was so much beyond what he saw,” he said quietly. “I always knew that. He was a white soul.”

“Yes—pure white,” agreed Wilfred. “But I did not see him as you did. Some of the things in these books were a revelation to me. Oh, there’s a mixture! But here and there are suggestions—notes—which go deep; things he wrote for himself alone and never spoke about.”

Martyn opened the pages, and his tired eyes smiled.

“Yes—a mixture,” he agreed. “Notes of a sermon next to hints on conjuring tricks.... Extracts from Parliamentary speeches.... And here—a list of Salvation Army Band Instruments.”

He was silent as he came to some of the pages to which Wilfred had referred. Jim had lived very close to the Unseen, and it had transfigured all his life. Martyn read reverently—without comment. He turned over several blank pages, then his eyes fell upon a heading. “What I know of my friend, Martyn Royce.”

Martyn breathed hard. What had Jim known? Only good—because he could know no evil. He turned the page—pondering.

“May I keep it?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Wilfred. “You were more to him than I was—to my shame. But this is one I brought specially for you,” and he took up the small red book which Martyn had not opened. “I never knew he wrote verses, but there are some here that are evidently his.”

He found the place, then passed the open book to Martyn.

Martyn read—“My Princess.” He looked at Wilfred, and his eyes were expressionless.

“I brought that for you,” Wilfred said. “I thought perhaps you’d send it on. There’s no doubt whom it is meant for. And there’s another—a nature one—which seems to me rather wonderful, in its sentiment and insight. You’ll find it there.”

Martyn turned over the leaves, but he was not reading. He was suddenly wishing that Wilfred would go, so that he might be alone. Before long Wilfred rose.

“I promised to take Mrs. Mildmay out,” he said, reluctantly. “We ought to be going before it gets dark. Do you think she’s ready?”

Martyn went to see. A few minutes later his guests left the house. He shut the door. He would not be disturbed again.

*My Princess.* Jim had written a poem to Clare; and now—when he could have neither Clare nor Jim—the poem had come to Martyn. To Jim the “Princess” had been wholly beautiful. The simple verses he had written to her—in secret—were beautiful too. How had he discovered “the world of mystery in her tender deep blue eyes?” What had he seen there? What Martyn once had seen!

What a torturing tyrant Memory can be. “Wait till I get my longuns,” the gay voice was saying; and Jim was standing by

the open window in the sunshine with Clare, slim and white, her waist encircled by his arm....” She’s glad she married you,” Jim was saying, while Clare’s cheek rested on his curly head. Glad! Oh, Jim—not glad now. The splendour has gone.

Martyn sat by the fire brooding—the little leather-bound book in his hand. Presently he rose, and crossed over to his desk. He took up his pen and began to write. He wrote fast, and time sped as thoughts came unbidden—thoughts beautiful and precious. He had found his new book. Out of suffering it was born, and it was to grow into a thing of beauty. Jim had gone, but the Memory of Jim remained; Martyn would preserve that memory that others might share its beauty.

In the days that followed he worked at his love-task. His only fear was that he should not do the child justice. He was writing for love alone, but as he wrote Jim lived again in the book, and again he was a blessing.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### *GWENITH WINS*

THE cold and the darkness of winter were yielding before the approach of spring. Mrs. Mildmay still stayed with her son, for no word had come from her husband. Wilfred moved between two homes restlessly, and Martyn feverishly continued his work.

But Spring was in the air; new desires were waking in the hearts of men—old hopes were being re-born. Martyn understood Wilfred's restlessness, though Wilfred himself had not interpreted his need; the universal human need; the need which Adam felt in Eden, before he found his mate. Martyn had never owned himself in the wrong, but he knew that he was in Wilfred's debt; he dragged his thoughts away from his work and considered Wilfred. He remembered the plain girl with the clear gray eyes, whose secret he had discovered when he was far too angry to be sympathetic. He had not made any mistake there, he was sure. He began to work for Gwenith, in unacknowledged expiation.

His friends found that Martyn Royce had suddenly become a little less unsociable. He and Wilfred were seen about together; and somehow it happened that they continually came across the gray-eyed girl who felt herself so poor with her forty thousand a year.

But, as Martyn saw, Wilfred hardly noticed her. Gwenith unconsciously forced his grudging admiration. She was so plucky and bright; a girl worth winning. Yet Wilfred did not see. He did not know what he needed; but Martyn knew.

“Wilf, old man, why don’t you settle down?” Martyn suggested, one afternoon, as they paced the terrace before the old Jacobean house: the terrace where, long ago, Martyn had spoken of Iva; where once Clare had had tea with Jim—a tea with special pink cakes and raspberries and cream.

“I hadn’t thought of it,” Wilfred answered, with a bashful laugh. “I’m not in love.”

“Quite time you were, then!” curtly.

“But, Martyn, one doesn’t love to order,” Wilfred protested. “You know that.”

“Confound what I know! You need a wife more than any man I’ve ever met.”

“Why?”

“You’re just a big baby. You want taking care of!”

“Martyn!”—Wilfred’s tone was a protest.

“Well—it’s true,” irritably. “And I wish you’d realise it!”

“Do you think anyone—anyone good—would have me? You know I—I—haven’t been up to much.”

“I think it might be managed.”

“Are you going to find her for me?”

Martyn looked across the fragrant sunlit spaces, crushing back his own longings. The spring was almost more than he could bear. But he must pay his debt to Wilfred.

“Why don’t you use your eyes?” he demanded, kicking a loose stone out of his path. “I’ve no patience with you!”

Wilfred flushed. “What’s the matter with you to-day?” he asked bewildered.

“Matter! I’m only thinking of what you might have, if you weren’t such an idiot.”

“What do you mean, Martyn?”

“Mean!” hotly—because of the fire in his bones. “Isn’t all nature telling you? Wilf, don’t be a fool and miss it because of a plain face that you’re too careless to find beautiful. That’s all I have to say. Make what you can of it!... Here’s Lord Alwyn,” and Martyn turned at the sound of the visitors he had been expecting. “It looks as if he’s brought his guests with him. I’d better help you entertain them.”

How did Martyn manage it? Wilfred did not know; but presently he found himself alone with Gwenith Grattan—forgetful that he was host. The air was warm with sunshine. The sunshine was calling to the buried seeds. Sap was rising in the trees. Birds were mating. Gwenith and Wilfred were together in a world where nothing was single; and the blood of youth was in their veins.

They walked side by side on the springy turf. She was just a slip of a girl. Her head only reached as far as Wilfred’s shoulder, but that head was carried royally. Her slight body was full of grace and strength—Gwenith was an accomplished sportswoman; and the quaint little brown face with its irregular features and clear gray eyes, might well have set a man’s pulses throbbing had Gwenith ever willed to charm. But that was not Gwenith’s way.

Buds were bursting; snowdrops and crocuses were in bloom; the air was sweet with the scent of growing things, and throbbed with the joy of the earth. They two were alone together, and youth was theirs.

They crossed a little bridge and went into the wood which belonged to the garden. It is said that God walked in Eden in the cool of the day. Still there are gardens where one fancies that He walks, and love is no longer afraid. Gwenith stooped



to gather some large fragrant violets. “I think they’re much more lovely than orchids,” she remarked.

Wilfred watched her in silence.

“I like these quiet woods, don’t you?” she said, glancing up from her flowers. “But it’s the hills and moors that make one feel satisfied—and the grand old sea.”

“Do those things satisfy you?”

She looked at him quickly, to see if he expected an answer. “We’re going to find them next week,” she said, realising that he did not. “Bonnie Gallowa—don’t you know it?”

She stood upright, put her hands behind her, and threw back her small head, as she repeated euphoniously:

“Land o’ birk an’ rowan tree,  
Land o’ fell an’ forest free,  
Land that’s aye sae dear to me—  
Bonnie Gallowa.”

Wilfred was looking at her with new sight. Was Martyn thinking of Gwenith when he spoke of a plain face? But Gwenith was not plain. How her eyes shone!

“I like that,” he said. “You’re wanting to be off?”

The girl’s eyes dropped again, and she stooped to pick a white violet. Why would he not understand! Always she had loved Wilfred, and Wilfred had never known. But now he needed her. She was sure that he needed her. Because of that need she dared. Her heart beat fast, her hands trembled, but she raised her head and looked into his eyes—baring her soul.

“No, I’m not!” she said defiantly.

Suddenly he understood.

He had said that he was not in love; but the buds were bursting—the birds were mating—the air was full of sunshine. They two were alone together, and youth was theirs.

“Why—Gwen!” he faltered, marvelling.

Martyn had been right. The wonder of it filled his soul.

Then he began to explain—hesitantly, not realising how much he was accepting as granted. He could not pretend after that one long look.

“But I’m not what you think me,” he confessed.

“I know,” said Gwenith.

“I’ve been an awful cad....”

“I know,” agreed Gwenith softly.

“And I’ve been letting myself go to the dogs....”

“I know,” said Gwenith—motherwise.

“You know!” he echoed. “And yet.... But there’s something else, Gwyn. I didn’t realise before. *I want you.*”

“I know,” said Gwenith with a proud thrill in her voice. “I know.”

Then he took her in his arms and kissed her—and Gwenith was no longer poor.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### *THE RESURRECTION MORNING*

MARTYN was alone. He had come home from Wilfred's to find a brief note from his mother telling him that her husband had sent for her, and she must go. He had tossed the note into the fire, and returned to his lately hindered work.

Wilfred had gone to "Bonnie Gallowa" with Gwenith, and Sir Francis and Lady Sydney, and Martyn knew that he would be rich once more, for Gwenith had great possessions.

Clare was getting farther and farther away, touring in Scotland. She was now among the mountains—the snow-covered range of the Grampians. Her work was taking her out of herself; though it was wearing her physically, it was helping her to keep sane.

It was nearing Easter. There had been no talk of her return; but in her dreams she was finding her lover; and the light in his eyes was as it had been in the golden days of their summertime.

Martyn was looking worn and aged, but he had no fear of breaking down; that was not for him. Alone in his desolate home he, too, worked to keep sane, and Jim's book reached its beautiful completion.

It was Good Friday. Martyn shut himself in his study—while Clare, far away, was watching the miracle of springtime—and began to read the completed manuscript.

Clare was alone in the waking woods amid far reaching heather hills that still slept beneath their covering of snow.

Springtime had not failed. The Lord was keeping His ancient tryst. Life was unfolding from death. The tall strong trees that had lately stood stark and barren, were now putting forth tender living green. The withered ferns whose beauty had faded, revealed the awakening of life in the exquisite uncurling fronds.

“If a seed die, shall it live again?” In this haunted garden of God, Clare read the wonderful answer.

If a love die, shall it live again? Clare, alone in the woods with God, knew surely—*There is no death*. One day—very soon—Martyn too would know.

She lay down on the heather and closed her eyes. Peace stooped over her and kissed the tired lids to sleep. Love enfolded her....

It was a beautiful life that Martyn portrayed; and he had portrayed it beautifully. He had not known what treasures he had subconsciously stored, until he began to bring them out for others; then memories—winning and radiant—came trooping into consciousness, and through them the child lived again. Martyn had wanted to give Jim to the world, and in giving he had gained.

His writing was always preceded by clear thinking, and carefully planned; yet as he wrote he often reproduced visions of which he himself had been hardly conscious. When he went over what he had written, he often experienced that sense of surprise that had been his when Clare first read to him, and he had wondered—“Is it possible I really wrote that!”

As he read the pages of the book that Jim had inspired, Martyn discovered thoughts of which he had no memory—visions that had faded as they were captured; and, more

marvellous still, a picture he was quite unconscious of having painted.

Ever since that wonderful day when for him the heavens were opened—the day on which Clare first saw Jim Cavendish, coming towards her in the sunshine across a golden sandy shore—Martyn had subconsciously associated Jim with Clare. As he read Jim's book he found her image imprinted on its pages. The book was of Jim, but round about Jim there hovered the spirit of the "Princess" he had so loved, and Martyn found that he could not see one without seeing the other.

The picture was beautiful. He looked at it marvelling. It was Clare as Jim had known her—as Martyn had seen her when he controlled the hot passion of his desire that he might not win her except by way of the highest.

He looked up from the written pages—the vision was so real. His eyes had the same far-away concentrated look that they had had held when Clare was in the Brahmin's twilight room.... And Clare—awaking from her sleep on the heather—stretched out her arms, and smiled....

In the evening Martyn took up a copy of *Fellow Farers*. He had not looked at it since he had lost Clare, but just once more he would dream. In Jim's book he had found Clare; in *Fellow Farers* he should find her again—or find the Ideal which love of her had had power to create.

Looking, he saw that the two pictures were one....

At last he put the book down. He must dream no more. He must read these books no more. They started longings past the strength of man to bear.

The next day he went for a long, lonely tramp, returning at night resolved to revise the manuscript that Wilfred had

stolen and returned, and which he had thrown into a drawer and forgotten. He would face hard facts again, and free himself from sentiment. There was money in that book, and fame. Why had he left it so long?

He took off the carelessly tied brown paper, lit a cigarette, and began to read. He had forgotten much of what he had written, for he had been down into hell since then.... Yes—he had done what he had set out to do. He had described ugly things, vile things, brutal things; and he had described them relentlessly. Lord Alwyn had said it was the strongest book that he had ever written; yet he had suggested that it might defeat its purpose through its very power. As he read the book again with keener judgment, Martyn remembered that Clare had suggested the greater wisdom of fighting evil by the portrayal of good. He had thought the suggestion effeminate. But now the conviction began to take hold of his mind, that his portrait of Jim—sympathetic and true—would have more weight with the public than all the vivid disclosures in the book that he knew to be so strong.

What a mixed medley Jim's little note-books had displayed! Jokes, verses, music, texts, quotations from the ancients. Martyn paused in his reading—remembering. He had found them transcribed in pencil in the clear, boyish writing.

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;—if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise—think on these things.”

From Paul, Jim had gone to Marcus Aurelius.

“Your manners will depend very much on the quality of what you frequently think on; for the soul is tinged and colored with the complexion of thought.”

Jim’s thoughts had been pure, and his soul had remained unspotted. A man’s soul could not be as a child’s—and yet....

Suddenly a leaden cloud seemed to be lifted from Martyn’s mind. He put his hands over his eyes, bewildered. What had happened? What had he done?...

A lamp-lit street....” A woman who was a sinner.” ... A man who was infamously vile.... And Clare ... Clare....

He had been in the restaurant. He had rushed out after them. After Clare—that man. What was it that he had felt? Blind fury—hate ... jealousy? Was even that possible? Jealousy of his personal possessions? No! No!... He had come home.... Then ... a night that he dared not remember.

Clare had come back. Clare had come back.... What had he said? He could not remember.... Surely he must have been mad!... He had told her.... What? That he wanted never to see her again.... Yes, he remembered that.... His love.... Never to see her again!... Why? Why? Surely he had been mad. Mad with imagination and anger and hate and jealousy.

His hands dropped to his knees. He sat stunned, looking with blood-shot eyes at the broken figure of Love, lying shattered at his feet.

“You haven’t seen the scoundrel yet!” She had seen him now. It was the scoundrel who had shattered that once beautiful living image.

Suddenly he started up from his chair. The loosened manuscript was scattered pell-mell on the floor. The clean,

clear pages became soiled beneath his feet as he paced up and down the room. He did not notice.

Presently he went out into the garden. And it was night....

The birds awoke and flooded the mystic stillness of the Resurrection Dawn with thrilling song. In the pearl-gray eastern sky Venus reigned alone—the star of the new-born morning.

The light grew stronger. Martyn lifted his heavy eyes. Behind the newly clothed trees that crowned the eastern slopes spread a wonderful crimson splendor, its radiance glowing through the fresh young leaves. Over the tree-tops still shone the morning star; and southward, in a sky pearly gray and clear, floated the golden Easter moon.

Easter morning; yet the sealed stone blocked the door of the darkened sepulchre—the sepulchre where his Life lay buried.

Martyn stood motionless for a few minutes, bathed in the mystic morning light; then he turned and went heavily indoors. It was Easter Sunday. There was nothing that he could do....

Later, he went back to the study. Alice had not dared to touch his papers, which still littered the floor. He stooped and picked up the sheets, once so prized; still, potentially, money and fame. But their value had changed. The book had cost too much. He would never use it now. Later on, he would have a bonfire.

He threw the once valued sheets into the waste-paper basket, and went out on to the veranda overlooking the garden.



The bells were ringing for the Easter Service. The world was very beautiful.... But the stone lay at the door of the sepulchre—where his Life and Hope lay buried.

He stood in the sunshine; but his face was worn, his eyes dark with pain.... Suddenly his pulses started throbbing—aware before hearing or sight. He turned and went swiftly into the room. Then he stopped breathless—for the wonder of the open tomb.

Clare had come....

He stood still, not daring to believe; but—reading his eyes, in which love burned through pain—Clare answered their passionate longing with love’s self-giving abandon.

“Martyn.... You wanted me—” The quiet words dropped into his consciousness with the healing of love’s deep understanding.

There was a wonderful radiance about her; the glory of love re-born. It dominated her weariness. It took his into its strength.

She held out her hands—self-giving. He gripped them hungrily. Then he put her into his chair and fell on his knees beside her and buried his face in her lap. One of her warm hands sought and rested on his shoulder; she passed the other lingeringly over his bowed head, as she bent her own towards it.

“Beloved.”

It was the Resurrection morning.

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[The end of *Splendid Joy* by Marguerite Williams]