

*Forsaking all others*

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*Forsaking All Others*

BY

ALICE DUER MILLER

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# FORSAKING ALL OTHERS

# *Part One*

# I

“NOT that you’ll like him,” Nell said,  
    “No mystery—no romance,  
A fine, stern, eagle-like head,  
    But he simply reeks of finance,—  
Started from nothing—self-made—  
    And rather likes you to know it,  
And now collects porcelain and jade,  
    Or some Seventeenth Century poet.

“Married in simpler days,  
    A poor little wren of a being,  
Who exists to pray and praise,  
    And spends her life agreeing,  
Thin and dowdy and pale,  
    And getting paler and thinner—  
Well, the point of this dreary tale  
    Is I’ve asked them both to dinner.

“I’d leave her out like a shot,  
    For I’m not so keen about her,  
But, my dear, believe it or not,  
    He won’t dine out without her.  
She has that terrible hold  
    That aging wives exert to  
Replace young charms grown old—  
    Poor health and impeccable virtue.

“Lightly I asked them to dine,  
    And now I perceive the dangers,  
My friends—yours and mine—  
    Are so terribly rude to strangers.  
But you, dear girl, I can trust  
    To come and be brilliant and tender;  
Vamp the man, if you must,  
    But give an impression of splendor.”

## II

LEE sat before her mirror . . . rouged her lips,  
Set dripping diamond earrings in her ears,  
Polished a little at her finger tips,  
Thought that she did not look her thirty years;

Thought, "Poor dear Nellie's ill-assorted feasts!  
I want to be as helpful as I can  
Among that group of men and gods and beasts . . .  
Why does she think I shall not like this man?"

She made him sound entrancing . . . strong and crude,  
Successful, dominant . . . I, who for so long  
Have known a somewhat pitiful servitude  
To weakness, have no terror of the strong."

Her maid held up her cloak of furry white,  
And gave her money in a golden purse.  
She sighed: "Not even third-rate bridge to-night,  
Just third-rate conversation . . . which is worse."



### III

“NELLIE, I’m sorry I’m late,  
Edward, I honestly am.  
Just the malignance of fate  
I always get caught in a jam  
Whenever I’m coming to you . . .”  
“Mrs. Wayne back of you, Lee,  
And Mr. Wayne.”  
“How do you do.  
Isn’t that cocktail for me?”

## IV

### MENU

CAVIAR, cocktails, soup of black bean,  
Shad, Moët-Chandon of 1919,  
A saddle of mutton, a stuffed aubergine,  
With some *crème de menthe* jelly of beautiful green,  
Avocados and lettuce and cold galantine  
And *baba au rhum* with a sauce grenadine,  
Coffee and fruit and some excellent *fine*.

SOME women—hard, beautiful women—know a way  
 Of looking up at a man, so gentle and gay,  
 A magical child-like look that seems to say:  
 Let us be happy together for an hour, a day,  
 A night, or forever. Let us yield to the charm.

Lee looked at Wayne and put her hand on his arm,  
 Under the broadcloth and linen she felt his muscles like steel,  
 Feeling, she said to herself, as a man's arm ought to feel.  
 And she glanced at her own hand there, so slim and cool  
 With its single cabochon emerald, like a deep green pool.  
 "Shall we go first," she asked him, "or let them all go ahead?"  
 And so they spoke of leading . . . and being led.

And then she told him a story, heard she didn't know when,  
 Of an arctic expedition, from which two men  
 Had got lost and while they were off and away  
 They met a dog, starving like them and astray . . .  
 A clever heroic creature, who in the end  
 Guided them back, and they loved that dog like a friend;—  
 Loved him and worried about him all the way back . . .  
 What would he do when he met the head of the pack,  
 The leader of dogs, the old dog, cruel and stern,  
 Who brooked no rival. How could this new dog learn . . .  
 Himself a leader and used to his own wild way,  
 How could he learn to be one of the pack and obey?  
 Would he not fight for mastery . . . hopeless . . . they caught their  
     breath.  
 Were they not leading this friend they loved to death?

And now the crisis was on them . . . they saw camp now,  
Two men in a fragile boat and a dog standing up in the prow.  
They pushed the boat as near as they could to the bank,  
And someone to help them land shoved out a plank,  
The new dog leaped on the plank, and the old dog, bristling and  
proud  
Made one step to meet him in front of the crowd,  
And they looked at each other a moment, and the old dog lay on his  
back,  
And the new dog stepped ashore . . . the head of the pack.  
“A very interesting story. Why did you tell it to me?”  
Asked Wayne, with his black eyes on her.  
“Why do you think?” asked Lee.

## VI

CANDLE light beams, flickers and blazes  
On panelled pine walls, fashioned of old;  
Pale pink roses in golden vases,  
Hothouse grapes in a bowl of gold;  
Crystal goblets, and plenty of them,  
Flashing their points of rainbow light.  
Tall, grave men servants bending above them,  
Everyone talking with all his might:—

“Why didn’t Archie go with Jessie?”

“My dear, she didn’t want him, of course.”

“Aren’t things getting a trifle messy?”

“There’s nothing messy about divorce.”

“Algy’s a sort of weak Othello.”

“Poor creature. Jessie is quite a bird.”

“I hear Nan’s doing her room in yellow.”

“Her room? I think it’s her *hair* you heard.”

“Tom never could resist a title.”

“Well, I’m rather a snob myself—”

“The woman is large and rich and vital

And does not mean to be laid on the shelf.”

“Nonsense, she’s older than Tom’s own mother,

And ought to be laid on a couple of shelves.”

While Lee and Wayne just talked to each other,

Talked to each other about themselves.

## VII

NELLIE and Edward left alone,  
Feeling their house again their own,  
Stood by the fire. “It seemed to me  
The Great Man fell with a crash for Lee . . .”

“Nellie, the dinner was very good.”

“Darling, so glad you liked your food:  
I’m afraid it’s all the fun you had,  
With Mrs. Wayne . . .”

“No, not so bad.  
I rather liked her. The old girl said  
Good things; she’s got a tongue in her head.  
But why the deuce need she look like that?  
She isn’t old and she isn’t fat.  
Wayne’s probably generous, certainly rich,  
Why need she dress like a Salem witch?”

“Oh, I could talk an hour,” said Nell,  
“On the psychic basis of dressing well.  
It isn’t a question of pocket-books,  
It isn’t a figure, it isn’t looks.  
It isn’t going to first-rate places.  
Believe me, the thing has a psychic basis.  
It’s caring . . . caring a terrible lot . . .”

Whether you’re right, or whether you’re not.  
It’s being a slave, yet now and then  
Snapping your fingers at gods and men.  
It’s art, it’s genius, it’s using your mind . . .  
What does the Bible say—‘that kind  
Comes not forth but by fasting and prayer . . .’  
Well, that’s the answer . . . you’ve got to care:  
And Mrs. Wayne clearly has not been caring  
For twenty years about what she was wearing.”

## VIII

AT first the Waynes were silent driving home.

Park Avenue tilted southward mile by mile  
Until a pale, golden, exotic dome

Stood like a gate across the steep defile.

Rain had been falling and the streets were black.

The traffic lights—emerald and carmine pink—  
Were clearly, perfectly reflected back

As in dark mirrors or a pool of ink.

And it was doubly beautiful and gay

When green or red flashed down the polished way.

Wayne in his corner, staring at the skies,

Thought, with his air of easy self-command:

“God, what a woman! What a skin, what eyes,

Lashes a man could feel against his hand.

She lacks a leader, and she knows her lack,

For all her skill and pride . . . I understood,

If I could turn Time’s moving finger back

How easily I could lead her, if I would.

‘Why do you tell that tale,’ I asked, ‘to me?’

She looked at me. ‘Why do you think?’ said she.

“If I were free . . . but I have led my life

With Ruth, and I am bound beyond repeal,

Bound faster to her than she knows: my wife

Is sceptical and wise, and true as steel.

I will not hurt her, as I once before

Hurt her. I have an oath in heaven; and so

I shall not see this lady any more.

Thank God I have the art of saying No.

I shall not go to see her in her flat

Or telephone or write her . . . that is that.”

Ruth, staring at the polished onyx street,  
Thought: “Merciful God, must I again endure  
This agony: must I again compete,  
I who am old and tired and insecure?  
And she is beautiful and white and slim,  
And confident of stirring men’s desire . . .  
I felt even as she first looked at him,  
Something that flashed between the two like fire.  
I always know when these wild passions start,  
By something sharp and sickening at my heart.

“Honey-toned Emily, my childhood friend  
Who sweetly laid her plans to take my place;  
And that stenographer in Little Bend  
With her mad eyes and her impassive face . . .  
Wild midnight scenes over the telephone,  
In office hours a most respectful ‘Sir’  
And yet her heart was set on him alone,  
She really loved him, and I pitied her.  
We had so much in common, she and I,  
She almost told me, when she said good-bye.

“But worst was Grace. Grace with her secret art . . .  
She made him feel in some Satanic way  
They were Olympians . . . she and he . . . apart,  
Superior to me . . . to common clay.  
They were spectators at a childish play,  
They were all-seeing, in a world of blind . . .  
I could have killed them both with ecstasy . . .  
She so contemptuous and he so kind . . .”

And suddenly his voice was at her ear,  
Saying: “Did you enjoy yourself, my dear?”



## IX

LEE alone in her room in the dark  
Stared out over Central Park.  
The rain brought out the primitive smell  
Of cold wet earth. Lee thought: "Ah, well,  
There is a man I certainly can  
Have if I want . . . and he is a man;  
A man who might possibly seethe and bubble,  
And be a good deal of fun, and a lot of trouble."

## *Part Two*

# I

A WEEK had passed,  
And Lee became aware  
That she had had no word, no line  
From Wayne, no sign,  
No coffin-like box of long-stemmed flowers.  
Nothing but silence, unfriendly, dumb.  
Yet at first  
She nursed  
Faith in her magical powers,  
Didn't much care,  
Feeling sure he would come  
At last.

But soon, she noticed, astounded,  
That she was always listening . . . hearing  
The telephone bell whenever it sounded,  
Always hurrying, hoping, fearing . . .  
Surely this time it must be—it *is*,  
His voice I shall hear. But it never was his.

Other men came and wrote and wired,  
Other men flattered her smallest whim.  
More and more she desired  
Only a word from him . . .

## II

SHE saw him once in the street  
On a fair sweet mild March day,  
And her heart began to beat  
Or ever her mind could say:  
“It is he at last—we shall meet.”

But he passed her by unaware  
Of her presence. “Well, well,” thought she,  
“I shall not trouble nor care  
For a man who cares nothing for me.  
There are men enough and to spare.”

Yet she wondered: “How is he able  
To leave his office at noon?  
Is some lovely being in pearls and sable  
Waiting his coming soon  
At a screened and shaded table?”

### III

NELLIE, to make matters worse, would say,  
Whenever they met: “I have no doubt  
You see poor Jim Wayne every day,  
Hopelessly hanging about.”

And Lee would laugh as she answered: “He  
Belongs, I fear, to that class in life  
That thinks it wrong to go out to tea  
Without his wedded wife.”

But her faith in herself was bruised and shaken,  
She who had seen so much of men;  
And she thought: “Can I possibly be mistaken,  
Was there nothing between us, then?”

“What is it keeps him away, I wonder?  
Does he lack courage . . . has he no thirst  
For life? Oh, dear, it would be a blunder  
For me to call him first.”

And then in spite of this long debating,  
She’d called his office . . . she didn’t know how,  
And a strange voice said, after keeping her waiting:  
“Mr. Wayne’s out, just now.”

#### IV

SHE went to an auction sale,  
Not that she meant to buy,  
But just to feast her eye  
On quiet *blanc de chine* statuettes . . .  
Elegant ladies, tall and pale,  
Porcelain bowls like a rainy sky,  
Bottles in delicate cucumber greens,  
Icy crystalline figurines,  
Turquoise vases and lacquered screens . . .

She went with a man who came from the West  
To buy for a great collector there.  
He knew his subject and let her share  
His knowledge.

“The Fogg Museum’s best  
For that particular kind of ware . . .  
That is atrocious . . . that is fair . . .  
(Only of course it isn’t Ming)  
This is the item I want . . . by far  
The most beautiful, delicate, perfect thing  
In the sale . . . the peachblow jar.”

The bidding was instantly brisk and pleasant.  
Everyone present  
Bid on the jar, but it soon was plain  
Out of the roomful only two  
Meant business,—her friend and another man, who  
From the back of the room kept bidding steadily  
Raising in hundreds only too readily,  
Lee, like others, turning to see  
Who this mad bidder could possibly be,  
Saw it was Wayne.

And when the auctioneer said “Sold  
To Mr. W.” (say it sadly  
As if the enormous price were small)  
Lee knew as well as if she’d been told  
That Wayne had only been bidding madly,  
Only been bidding perhaps at all  
Because she was there to admire:  
That he hadn’t come with a settled plan,  
But had yielded himself to the spur  
Of a sudden male desire  
To take the peachblow jar . . . and her . . .  
Away from another man.  
And she thought: “He is mine once more.  
He sees it is fated.  
He’ll be there when I get to the door . . .”  
But she found that he had not waited.

THAT night at dinner, Ruth and Wayne alone  
Talked in the somewhat uninspiring tone  
Of couples married almost twenty years:

“I need not go to Boston, it appears,  
This week, at least . . .”

  “My dear, I am so glad;  
Your cold . . .”

  “I haven’t got a cold.” “You had  
A bad one Sunday.”

  “No, it wasn’t bad.”

And Ruth, who knew him as good sailors know  
The weather, knew that he had meant to go  
To see those porcelains sold. “And did you bid?”  
She asked him.

  “Yes, unhappily, I did.”

He smiled and named the price he paid, and thought  
Of Lee’s turned profile; and as if she caught  
His vision, Ruth began to speak of Lee . . .  
How she had heard that afternoon at tea  
The story of that pretty Mrs. Kent  
They’d met . . . well, he’d remember whom she meant.  
Yes, he remembered.

  Was it all perhaps  
One of those harmless, half-unconscious plots  
That anguished wives will fashion to discover  
Whether they see another woman’s lover  
Across their table—at their bedroom door . . .

Who knows? Assuredly Ruth’s manner bore  
No sign . . . she told a story . . . nothing more.



## VI

“IT seems that in Nineteen Seventeen,  
She worked in an officers’ club or canteen  
Here in New York. She was under twenty,  
Young and lovely, and men in plenty  
Wanted to marry her . . . Tom, Dick and Harry . . .  
But there wasn’t one that she wanted to marry.

“Then one day into her canteen came  
Kent, in his officer’s shoulder straps.  
They had met as children—had had perhaps  
One of those strange ethereal wild  
Love affairs that you have as a child.  
She knew him at once; he was just the same  
Silent, sensitive boy, athirst  
For every sort of beauty and knowledge,  
Unfit for fighting, and so the first  
To enlist, to leave some nice little college  
Where he’d been teaching . . . and what was worse . . .  
Writing rather poor English verse.

“Some weeks before his regiment  
Sailed for France, she married Kent.

“In the course of the next infernal spring—  
As to just when and where I’m a little bit hazy—  
In the course of that final German drive  
The boy went through some terrible thing—  
Was lost or blown up or buried alive,  
And he went insane—went raving crazy—  
Is utterly out of his mind to-day,  
Hopeless, shut up in some remote  
Asylum. Terrible scenes occur  
Whenever she sees him, and yet they say  
He’s always calling, longing for her,  
And tries when he sees her to cut her throat.

“That beautiful woman . . . that poor mad poet—  
As sad a story as ever I heard.”

She looked at her husband; if he was stirred  
By her tale, he certainly did not show it.  
“Perhaps you knew it already,” said Ruth.  
“No,” he answered, and spoke the truth.

## VII

“Dear Mr. Wayne:

Did you quite forget  
You promised to come to tea some day?  
I know you're busy and great, but yet  
The great are the ones to do as they say.  
Kings and emperors never may  
Make their devoted subjects wait.  
Everyone suffers too much if they  
Forget an acquaintance, or break a date.  
This is the price of being great . . .  
Not too severe, I assume you say,  
You will always find me rather late.  
Very sincerely yours, L. K.”

## VIII

HIS answer came . . . thanks for her charming letter . . .  
Kept at the office every afternoon . . .  
But when the market got a little better . . .  
He'd do himself the pleasure very soon  
Of dropping in . . . And meantime he'd remain  
Truly . . . a scrawl that meant James Henry Wayne.

A woman though much less quick and clever  
Than Lee could see that this meant "never."

## IX

AND as she read that letter, she became  
The primitive huntress; neither fear nor shame  
Could turn her from her purpose now. For still  
She felt his love, and his cool reasoned will  
Seemed to her trivial . . . a straw . . . beside  
Her love that rode victorious on the tide  
Of will *and* passion.

For woman's love is clear  
And primal and unquestioned, and as near  
To nature as the fall of day and night,  
The tides, the seasons . . . It assumes its right  
To earthly consummation as a star  
Its right to shine. For it is older, far  
Older by long millenniums and ages  
Than all such moral principles as sages  
Invent to guide man through his native fog—  
Such as conventions and the Decalogue.

X

AN April day, and a salt breeze blowing  
Leaving the taste of brine on the lip,  
Round the Battery waters flowing  
As if New York were a clipper-ship;—

A mighty freighted vessel sailing  
Away to some vast and perilous dream  
With a thousand mastheads flaunting, trailing  
Beautiful banners of smoke and steam.

Wayne at his office window, chinking  
Keys in his pocket, staring away  
Over the windy harbour, thinking:  
“What am I doing? Why do I stay?”

“I who have earned the right to leisure,  
Why do I work like a galley slave?  
Work without risk or need or pleasure . . .  
What a goddam silly way to behave!

“Why am I not at this moment flying  
Before this gale on a leeward reach  
Or digging for buried gold, or lying  
By a warm blue sea on a hot white beach?”

“Time enough when my hair is graying,  
Time enough when my back is bent . . .”  
And at this an office-boy entered, saying:  
“A lady to see you, Sir,—Mrs. Kent.”

## *Part Three*

# I

THERE was an instant when he might have said  
He could not see the lady; but instead  
He nodded with a blank, impassive face,  
And waited, never moving from his place  
Beside the window, till a moment more  
And she was there, leaning against the door  
Which she had closed. She stood there, silent, staring,  
Trembling with fear at her own act of daring,  
But not with fear of him. Erect and slim,  
White as the daytime moon, she spoke to him.

“I know,” she said, “that it was not your plan  
That we should ever meet: I know a man  
Assumes despotic power, assumes his voice  
In cases such as ours shall have the choice . . .

“But is that just, I ask . . . is that fair play  
That you should have the right to throw away,  
Crush and destroy and utterly deny  
Our joint possession . . . or rather *mine*, for I  
Value our friendship so much more than you  
Appear to . . .”

“No,” he said, “That is not true.”

She shook her head. “Ah, if you thought it rare,  
Precious and wonderful, you would not dare  
Destroy it by yourself . . . not even you.”  
He answered: “I not only would. I do.  
You speak of friendship. What a silly word,  
And as dishonest as I ever heard.  
Let us at least be candid, for God’s sake,  
And speak the truth . . . what difference does it make?  
It is not friendship we are speaking of,  
But the first moments of a passionate love . . .”



“You’re wrong,” she cried, “you’re absolutely wrong.  
Not everything emotional and strong  
Between a man and woman needs must be  
Physical love . . . People like you and me  
Are wise enough and old enough to take  
This fiery elemental thing and make  
Something for every day, serene and cool . . .  
I am not of the all-or-nothing school.”

He smiled. “We light hell-fires, and you engage  
They’ll warm our palsied hands in out old age.”  
At this she paused, and then she said:

“Your tone  
Wounds me. I live so terribly alone,  
I am perhaps too eager for a friend . . .  
But not a lover. Oh, please comprehend  
I want no lovers. Think me vain or not  
But I assure you I might have a lot  
Of them. But friendship such as you could give—  
Wisdom and strength and knowledge how to live  
In this harsh world in which I draw my breath  
With so much pain . . . it seems a son of death  
To yield so rich a promise . . . to forego  
Such happiness . . .”

She heard him laugh. “You know  
All that is nonsense.”

“Nonsense?”

“All but this.”

And on her willing lips she felt his kiss.

## II

“I HAVE a new friend,” thought Lee, “I have a lover,  
Made of steel and fire as a lover ought to be,  
And I do not much care if all the world discover  
That I adore him madly and that he loves me.

“Everything I do nowadays is pleasant,—  
Talking, walking, brushing out my hair—  
Oh, isn’t it fine a friend, not being even present,  
Can give the world a meaning, and common things an air!”

### III

O, AGONY infernal  
That lovers undergo!  
O, secret trysts diurnal  
That nobody must know.  
O, vigilance eternal  
The whole world for a foe.

But Lee and Wayne were clever  
And all that springtime through  
They met and met, and never  
Were noticed so to do.  
And no one whatsoever  
Suspected them—or knew.

## IV

LOVE in a city in spring,  
Not so divine a thing  
As love the poet dreams—  
Meadows and brimming streams,  
Yet there is much to say  
For love in New York in May—  
Parks set in tulip beds,  
Yellows and whites and reds,  
Japanese plums in flower  
And that wisteria bower  
Dripping its blossoms sweet  
Over a rustic seat  
Where tramps and nursemaids meet . . .

New York in early May  
Breaks out in awnings gay;  
Daisies and ivy trailing  
From every window railing.  
And at this time of year  
Strange open hacks appear,  
Shabby and old and low  
Wherein strange couples go  
Generally after dark,  
Clop-clopping round the park.

And with it all, the loud,  
Noisy, indifferent crowd  
Offers to lovers shrewd  
Infinite solitude.

FOUR thousand years ago a great king died,  
And there were rites and hymns and long processions,  
And he was buried in his pomp and pride,  
With all his vast possessions.

Gold beds with lapis-lazuli inlay,  
And chairs, and perfume jars of alabaster,  
And many slaves were slain, lest they betray  
The tomb that held their master.

Lee leant her hand upon his mummy case,  
(Opened to show the gold and silver plating),  
And as Wayne came her look was an embrace:  
“Darling, I don’t mind waiting.

“I like,” she said, “to settle in my seat  
A moment ere the rising of the curtain,  
Waiting for something certain can be sweet . . .  
For something almost certain.”

## VI

THEY would meet for luncheon every day  
At a small unknown French café  
Half-way up town and half-way down  
With a chef deserving great renown.  
And Pierre the waiter would smile and say:  
“*Bonjour, Monsieur, dame,*” and they  
Would see by his smile discreet and sly  
That he knew exactly the reason why  
A couple so proud and rich should come  
To eat each day in a squalid slum.  
And nothing delighted his Gallic heart  
More than to find he could play a part  
And protect “*ces amoureux foux d’amour*”  
And guide their choice through the *carte du jour*.

## VII

BUT most of all Lee loved the hours  
    When streets filled full of violet mists  
And after-glows on taller towers  
    Prove that the sunset still exists:  
And in Wayne's long dark car reclining  
    They'd cross a bridge, and bye and bye  
Turn back to see the city shining  
    Against a pale blue, star-sewn sky.

## VIII

“I KNOW,” she said, “I am a fool to weep,  
I know the time will pass, however black.  
Oh, Jim, if I could take a drug, and sleep  
And sleep till you come back.

“Do you remember how poor Juliet said:  
‘Think you that we shall ever meet again?’  
And what was poor weak Romeo instead  
Of you . . . a king of men!

“Don’t be surprised to find me at the train  
With pipes and garlands and a choric dance,  
Telling the porters: ‘That is J. H. Wayne,  
My one supreme romance.’ ”

So it seemed natural to Lee to speak,  
If Wayne were going away for a week.



## IX

HE had been gone three days, when wearily strolling about  
She stopped and sent him a wire, writing it out  
With a pencil chained to a desk: "This is to say  
There are over eighty thousand seconds a day,  
Each one of them longer than seconds ought to be  
And a personal foe of yours devotedly Lee."

A LETTER from Ruth—a letter from Lee.  
 Wayne took them both with his bedroom key.  
 Every day since he went away  
 Lee had written him—*every day*—  
 How kind, how tender! And yet his wife  
 Had always written him, all his life,  
 Since that first Fall day, since that first fond year  
 When to part was really “*un peu mourir.*”  
 Ruth’s letters had come in her small, black writing,  
 So faithful—and now so unexciting—  
 A long unbreakable chain whose fetters  
 Were formed of those little daily letters,  
 Leading him back to his alien youth,  
 And his love—his first deep love of Ruth.

Once he had waited, young and lonely,  
 For those daily letters to come, the only  
 Solace in absence, terror-smitten,  
 Thinking, Dear God, if she hasn’t written!  
 When did they change? what day, what hour  
 Did her letters lose their magical power?  
 He was the same man, and she the same  
 Woman—and still her letters came . . .

A letter from Ruth—a letter from Lee.  
 Wayne took them both with his bedroom key.  
 Was it a habit—a memory  
 Of that deep old love that his heart once nursed?  
 Who knows?  
     He opened Ruth’s letter first.

## XI

THE day that Wayne was coming home,  
Lee flitted fleet-footed among the throng  
Of suburbanites shuffling their feet along  
Under the turquoise dome  
With the signs of the zodiac all turned wrong.

A blue-capped official, proud and remote,  
Was writing unmoved as the crowd increased  
Messages brief as those fingers wrote  
On the wall at Belshazzar's dreadful feast:  
"Train Fifty-One is on time. Train Eleven  
On time. Train Nineteen an hour late."  
And then the announcement, big with fate:  
"Train Fifteen on Track Forty-Seven."

And Lee's heart beat with a wild elation,  
And she ran like a child in a childish game,  
Pushed without pity or grace or shame  
Past women and children to take her station  
Where she could perfectly see  
Down the dark hole where the train would be—  
See Wayne as soon as he came.

The passengers came streaming out,  
Some with bags and some without,  
Some with babies, some with pets,

All about her was greeting,  
Kissing and meeting,  
Talking and lighting cigarettes.

And when she saw him coming,  
His head above the stream,  
No miracle so startling,  
So magical could seem,  
As this—that he was coming—  
A real man, not a dream!

## *Part Four*

# I

WAYNE was looking near and far  
After the theatre to find his car.  
He had taken his wife to the play that night;

Broadway was glittering hard and bright  
With every sort of electric light—  
Green and scarlet and diamond-white;  
And moving letters against the sky  
Told you exactly the reason why  
This or that was the thing to buy.  
And suddenly there at his side was Nell  
Vainly seeking her car as well.  
They talked for a moment . . . of meeting again . . .  
And how were Edward and Ruth, and then  
“I wonder,” said Nell, “if you ever see  
My lovely friend . . .”

“You mean,” said he,  
“That blue-eyed lady I once sat next . . .”  
“Exactly,” said Nellie. “I feel so vexed  
With Lee. I haven’t seen her this season,  
And between you and me, I know the reason.”  
“Do you indeed?” said Wayne.

“Oh, yes,”  
Nell answered. “I know . . . at least I guess.  
When a woman like that whom I’ve seen so much  
All of a sudden drops out of touch,  
Is always busy and never can  
Spare you a moment, it means a MAN.”

Wayne did not smile. "I am sure you are  
Right," he said. "Do you go so far  
In the magic art as to tell us who  
The man may be?"

"I certainly do,"

Said Nell. "It's that handsome young romantic  
Doctor who's driving the ladies frantic,  
So that they flock to be cured in shoals  
And talk of nothing but sex and souls,  
And self-expression, and physical passion . . .  
Of course, no wonder the man's the fashion."

"Does Mrs. Kent flock?"

"Oh, no, I meant

They've called him in to take care of Kent.  
Imagine the long deep conversations,  
The tears, the intimate revelations . . .  
I wish to all ladies, lonely and sad,  
Tied to a husband hopelessly mad  
A handsome psychiatrist . . . good or bad.  
Oh, there's my car," and so with a gay  
Good night to Wayne she was driven away.

People will come for miles, they say,  
To see a man burnt at the stake, yet none  
Turned in that crowd to look at one  
Standing quietly burning there,  
Suffering more than a man can bear,  
Consumed with hideous inner fire,  
Believing his love a cheat and a liar . . .  
Believing the moment that Nell had spoken,  
For that day of all days Lee had broken  
A date . . . at the time he had thought it queer,  
And now, by God, it was perfectly clear,  
Perfectly clear, no doubt whatever . . .  
A doctor, handsome and young and clever,  
With all this rotten erotic learning. . . .

Strange indeed that no head was turning  
To watch this gentleman quietly burning,  
In a trance of pain he heard Ruth say:  
“Well, dear, what did you think of that play?”

## II

“HOW could you think such a thing?”

“Try to forgive if you can.”

“Spoiling out beautiful Spring!”

“Well, I am only a man.”

“I will forgive, if I can.”

“Jealousy made me insane.”

“I never spoke to the man.”

“I’ll never doubt you again.”

“Jealousy made you insane.”

“Lee, you have much to forgive.”

“Oh, never doubt me again.”

“Never as long as I live.”

“Jim, I have much to forgive.”

“Yes, but I’ve suffered like hell.”

“Trust me as long as you live.”

“Dearest, I love you too well.”

“Poor darling, going through hell.”

“Spoiling our beautiful Spring.”

“I also love you too well.”

“How could I think such a thing?”



### III

LOVERS after a quarrel say to each other lightly:

“Dear, we are closer than ever: I love you better by far;

After the rainstorm is over, the sun shines even more brightly . . .”

Poor pitiful lovers, trying to hide the unsightly

Stain on the surface of love . . . the ineffaceable scar.

## IV

THE Spring was over, and Summer far advanced,—  
Lee spent many a hidden week in town,  
Days long and enchanted, and nights entranced,  
But one thought would not down:

“Is he content with this snatched and broken life?”  
She thought, “when we might be free?  
He cannot love that dowdy middle-aged wife.  
Does he really love me?”

She was not burnt by jealousy sudden and hot,  
But poisoned and chilled that he would not break  
A meagre tie to a wife she knew he could not  
Love,—yet would not forsake.

One night at her window, looking over the Park,  
With his strong hand on her shoulder prest,  
And a thunder-cloud rolling up out of the dark,  
Rolling out of the West.

Suddenly she heard herself quoting Macbeth:  
“ ‘To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus.’ ”  
He answered after a pause on a long-drawn breath:  
“Safety is not for us.”

AND from that moment Lee began—not nagging,  
She was too wise for that—but she began  
A secret steady pull, a silent dragging  
To break the other tie that bound this man.

And she would brood, injured, remote, self-centred  
At any mention that he had a wife;  
And something chill and faintly hostile entered  
The magic circle of this hidden life.

O lovers, those legitimately united  
In holy wedlock, and less happy, those  
Whose troth may never openly be plighted—  
(Less happy did I say? Alas, who knows?)

But lovers all, beware, and know the strongest  
Of wills may make a strong antagonist:  
And that love will not always linger longest  
With those who hold it in too clenched a fist.

## VI

YET on the whole they were happy, as day by day  
The long mysterious Summer passed away.  
None guessed their secret—except far off on a shady  
Lawn by the coast of Maine, a middle-aged lady  
Spending a quiet Summer almost alone  
In a great Victorian house of dark gray stone,  
Knew as she sat and stared at the cold Maine ocean  
Every event, every phase, every emotion  
Of that great romance. She knew, none better,  
Not by a chance or slip, or anonymous letter,  
Not through gossip by any tattler carried,  
But because she perfectly knew the man she had married.

## VII

“DO not go home for Sunday,  
Darling,” Lee’s letter said.  
“How I hate Friday to Monday!  
Stay with me here, instead.  
Life is so short, and one day  
Soon, we shall both be dead.

“The curse of love like ours  
Is that we seem to be  
Always cut short by powers  
Stronger than you and me.  
But if you stayed—what hours,  
Glorious, alone and free!”

## VIII

RUTH in her quiet garden beside the sea  
Thinking, "To-morrow at this time Jim will be  
Here at my side. It's something to be a wife—  
The background dull and assured of everyday life.  
He must come home, whether he wants to or not,  
To me, to me . . . All other women must plot,  
Arrange, manoeuver to see him . . ."

And then behind her  
She heard the steps of a servant coming to find her:  
A footman stood with a telegram held on a tray:  
"Terribly sorry I cannot get away  
This week-end. Better luck next. Love. Jim."

She turned her head to the footman, and said to him,  
"Say Mr. Wayne will not be here to-morrow."  
And the man withdrew and left her alone with her sorrow.

The sun went down behind the great blue hill,  
And she sat there alone in her garden, perfectly still,  
Watching the wraiths of fog blow in like smoke,  
And her heart as she sat there gently and quietly broke.

## IX

AN August Sunday in town,  
The Park all sere and brown,  
The noise of wheels died down.

Faint tepid breezes wake  
Now and again, and make  
Lee's slatted curtains shake.

Now and again in the street  
The sound of passing feet,  
And church bells, faint and sweet.

Faint bells that ought to mean  
A village spire seen  
Across a meadow green.

Faint bells . . . Wayne's early youth. . . .  
Going to church . . . in truth  
Going to church with Ruth.

Faint bells, and Lee cries, "Oh,  
How I should like to know  
Why bells depress me so!"

## X

BEFORE the skulls of Primitive Man,  
Lee stood and thought: "Are we part of a plan  
Of Nature's: or are we just a sort  
Of Cosmic Coincidence—a sport  
Of God—or worse, a sport of chance—  
Or of Ether—Nature's great romance?"

"How queer it would be, if it turned out we  
Were merely eddies—Jim and me—  
Meaningless eddies in ether swirled  
In and out of a meaningless world.  
Well, if we are it's nice to think  
We've had some moments upon the brink  
Of dissolution—of absolute chaos—  
Moments of joy that well repay us."

And she paused to note that her fellow eddy  
Was fifteen minutes late already.

Waiting she wandered from floor to floor,  
Every instant becoming more  
Uneasy, and going back to the door,  
Where Wayne ought to have been at exactly four.



She went from the skulls of Primitive Man  
To the mystic temples of Yucatan,  
Or studied gray elephants, vast and haughty,  
But with eyes like pigs' eyes, shrewd and naughty,  
Flamingoes of beautiful coral pink—  
The ancestry of the missing link—  
But in between she was always hurrying  
Back to the doorway, wondering, worrying—  
And then she saw with a horrid sinking  
Of heart, it was five! And she went home thinking,  
“Something has happened—he’s been struck  
By a ruthless, rollicking, rumbling truck,  
Or crushed by a taxi, and now is lying  
In some hospital ward—unknown and dying—  
Or if they knew would they send in truth  
For *me*? Oh, no, they would send for Ruth.”

And hurrying fast as the laws enable,  
She found a telegram on her table,  
Signed as usual, “J. H. Wayne:”

“Ruth has pneumonia alone in Maine,  
Of course I am taking the very first train.  
Sorry to miss you before I go.  
When I know my plans, I’ll let you know.”

The first emotion felt by Lee  
Was pure and perfect relief that he  
Was safe. And then she felt the force  
Of that cruel, domestic calm “of course.”

And then undeniably into her head  
Came the thought unbidden:—“If Ruth were dead—”  
And standing alone: “Poor thing,” she said.

# *Part Five*

# I

TRAINED nurses, trained nurses everywhere—

Trained nurses by night, trained nurses by day—

In the corridors, on the stair,

Looking for towels, carrying a tray;

Saying, “you mustn’t,” “you must,” “you may.”

Smooth as to hair, stiff as to skirt,

Kind in a cool, impersonal way,—

Angels of mercy, bright-eyed, alert,

Hard young angels, sent to avert

That older angel of dark despair—

Stiff starched angels, a trifle curt—

Trained nurses, trained nurses everywhere.

## II

A WHITE figure spoke from the doorway  
In a tone deliberately bright:  
“Would you like to see the patient  
For a moment, and say good night?”

Shepherded in like a stranger  
He stood beside her bed,  
Gazed at those pale, blank eyelids  
In that carven ivory head.

Took her hand and heard her  
Murmur: “Is that you, Jim?”  
But he knew she was very tired—  
Tired even of him.

Too much spent with the struggle  
Of drawing breath to afford  
A brief smile—utterly weary,  
And more than utterly bored.

### III

NEVER before had Ruth been out of reach:

Barriers had been—but only of his making.

Now she had passed beyond the power of speech,

Quite, quite indifferent that his heart was breaking.

Here in the bedroom that he used to share

She lived day after day, averse to living,

Indifferent, unforgiving, unaware

That he had any need of her forgiving.

## IV

At first Lee wrote to him every day  
Tactful letters, that let him see  
She knew very well he would rather be  
With her—but it wasn't the thing to say.

Tactful letters at first, and then  
Letters less tactful and more sincere,  
Ending: "Why don't you write to me, dear?"  
Write to me . . . over and over again.

But he could not answer her piteous call;  
Not exactly that he forgot  
Their love, but only that she had not  
Any reality for him at all.

She seemed like a pleasant book he had read—  
Read and enjoyed; but the printed page  
Cannot compete with the heritage  
Of Nature . . . the living, and Oh, the dead!

At last he sent her a brief reply:  
"I cannot write—or eat or sleep  
Just now. I am going through the deep  
Waters. Forgive me, dear Lee. Good-bye."

THEN a night came  
    When in sleep broken  
He heard his name  
    Suddenly spoken.  
Into his dream  
    Horrors flocked thickly—  
Was that a scream?  
    “Better come quickly!”

Cold was his room  
    And his hands shaking;  
Out of the gloom  
    Dawn was just breaking—  
Dawn cool and green  
    Over the ocean,  
Never more seen  
    Without emotion  
Of death—agony—  
    Somebody crying—  
All dawns that dawn, when he  
    Knew Ruth was dying.

## VI

WHAT can you do with a woman's things  
After a woman is dead?  
Not the bracelets and rings and strings  
Of pearls, but the small unvalued things—  
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with a woman's dresses,  
After a woman is dead?  
Hanging limp in the cedar presses,  
They are part of herself, her pretty dresses—  
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with a woman's shoes,  
After a woman is dead?  
Shoes that perhaps you helped her choose,  
Poor little empty half-worn shoes—  
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with her brush and comb,  
After a woman is dead?  
What in God's name can you do with her home  
And her loss and her love and her brush and comb—  
What can I do, Wayne said.



## VII

UP a little river  
    Where salmon used to play,  
Not twenty miles distant  
    A little village lay—  
Ruth's native village,  
    Where Wayne used to go  
To see his mother's mother  
    Many years ago.  
Here in a churchyard  
    With pines along the wall  
And a wooden church steeple  
    Almost too tall,  
Here in September,  
    On a bright clear day  
Among the graves of sailors,  
    They laid Ruth away.

In this same churchyard,  
    Sitting on the stones,  
He had first said he loved her  
    In young shaken tones.  
That had been September,  
    But not this bright light.  
Between the pine-needles  
    The stars shone white,—  
Such a little maiden,  
    Such a young man—  
“I love you.”—And she answered:  
    “I don't see how you can.”  
They had been so happy  
    They had not cared at all  
That the place was a churchyard  
    With pines along the wall.

## VIII

WAYNE stood bareheaded on the churchyard sward

By the open grave under the open sky:

“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord,

He who believeth in Me shall never die.”

Beautiful, terrible service! He heard a word

Here and there, and then he would drift away

To other memories and things not heard—

Ruth’s laugh when she used to laugh, so little and gay.

“When thou with rebukes dost chasten a man from sin . . .”

Was it sin that had parted him from Ruth?

Was sin the secret corrosion that entered in

Like a moth fretting the garment of love in youth?

Too late, too late! He heard the parson say:

“Before I go hence and be no more seen . . .

A thousand years in thy sight is but as yesterday . . .”

Too late, too late! “As grass in the morning green . . .”

Was it Ruth he was leaving here in the churchyard plot—

Could it be Ruth who had gone, not saying good-bye?

“What advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?

Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.”

How can a man help eating and drinking?

Die to-morrow! To-day, if he had his will.

How many years must he spend in thinking, thinking

Of the thing which someone has said that all men kill?

Well, he could bear what he must bear—even the sound

Of earth on a coffin falling. What must be must.

“We therefore commit her body to the ground,

Ashes to ashes, earth to earth, dust to dust.”

Prayers! Would they never be done, these killing

Rites for the dead! Ah, there was the organ’s roll

From the little church, and children’s voices shrilling,

Piping Ruth’s favourite hymn, “Hark, hark, my soul . . .”

“Hark, hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling  
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore;  
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling  
Of that new life where sin shall be no more!

Angels of Jesus,  
Angels of light,  
Singing to welcome  
The pilgrims of the night.”

## IX

“Dear Lee:—

I’ve tried so many times to write,  
And now I must write, for I sail next week  
For Italy—Sardinia—I might  
Go on to Egypt later, and the Greek  
Islands. I may be several years away.

“I loved you, Lee. I wonder if I can  
Explain at all what’s happened? From your wealth  
You gave me freely—more than any man  
Has ever had—beauty, wit, youth and health—  
I loved you passionately; and now my wife  
Is dead. One might expect a mild distress,  
A briefly pensive mood . . . Instead, my life  
Is shattered . . . is dissolved . . . is meaningless . . .  
She whom of late I thought so little of  
And saw so little, was, I find, the spring  
Of all I did and felt—even of my love  
Of you . . . What an insane, incredible thing!  
But there it is.

“Dear Lee, this is the truth:  
That any marriage founded on devotion  
Though that devotion die, as mine for Ruth,  
Is not a state, but a unique emotion,  
Potent, unalterable—not romantic  
Love, though romantic love is where it starts—  
Marriage begins only when those hot, frantic  
Fires have finished welding human hearts.  
It is not love, friendship, or partnership,  
But this emotion—marriage, of a force  
That when it once has held you in its grip  
Nothing will free you wholly—not divorce,  
Or death, for these destroy not it, but you,  
As I am now destroyed.

“Beware, dear Lee,  
Of a true marriage, if you are not true  
Yourself—or you will be destroyed—like me.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mrs. Miller was born and brought up in New York, and was graduated in 1899 from Barnard College. She took a scholarship in mathematics, with the idea of making a career in that field. But her marriage, which took her to live in Central America, made the teaching of mathematics impossible, and she turned to writing fiction. The success of some of those early stories like *Come Out of the Kitchen* and *The Charm School* drew her definitely into writing as a profession. Mrs. Miller's real interest, however, has remained with her early enthusiasms—mathematics and poetry, subjects which mathematicians declare are closely connected.*

*Among Mrs. Miller's many successful works, the novel, *Manslaughter*, and her poem, *The White Cliffs*, are perhaps the best known.*

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Forsaking All Others* by Alice Duer Miller]