

The Green Gate

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THE GREEN GATE

BY ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF WINDOWS," ETC.

I have always held that when a man in my profession begins to balk at the disagreeable, he had better give up medicine and devote himself to agriculture. One might, I suppose, succeed as a farmer without being disagreeable to anyone, save, perhaps, the hired man. At any rate, one might manage to rub along without being compelled to dash the dearest hopes of one's best friends. But science knows no friendship and respects no claims but her own. Her votaries, if they would be true to her, must harden their hearts daily. Above all men, must they speak the truth and show no favour.

In the matter of speaking the truth to Harold I had been hardening my heart all day. I intended to tell him now, very soon, as soon as I could manage to persuade my collar button to stick. But the collar button took a lot of persuading, and when at last it was firmly settled I found that my hair needed a second brushing and that I had mislaid my eye-glasses. It took a long time to find the eye-glasses! I was still hunting for them when Harold's voice called to me through the open window.

"Coming!" I said, "Coming!"

I was afraid that Harold might think that I was later than usual on purpose. But I am not a man who hesitates. "When sure you are right, never hesitate!" That had been the motto which I had hung upon an invisible nail in my brain long ago, and to a steady following of it I owed much of my success. Prompt action had become a habit. I seldom hesitated—I was not hesitating now. I was looking for my eye-glasses.

Harold's useless pacing of the verandah began to make me nervous, although as a specialist in nervous disorders I am not supposed to have any nerves. He had been walking up and down beneath my window for a long half-hour and the monotonous sound put me irresistibly in mind of a game we used to play at school. But I must take my courage in both hands and go down to meet him. Strangely enough, I found my eye-glasses just at this moment, and all reason for further lingering was gone. A draught from somewhere near caught the door as I went out and slammed it loudly. Harold's steady pacing stopped.

“Is that you, Mack? Come out on the verandah.”

“If it takes you that long to dress,” he added as I found him, “why don’t you get a man?”

“And if you must prowl up and down like a hungry hyena,” I answered, “why don’t you choose the other side of the verandah?”

After this interchange of courtesies we both felt better, and I explained how I had mislaid my eye-glasses and he apologized for the lateness of dinner.

“But you know,” he explained, “we thought we would wait, in the chance of father turning up. I rather expect him to-night. There is a train at seven.”

“To-night?” I could not keep the consternation out of my voice.

“Yes. The week is up to-night. Had you forgotten? Dad does not strike you as a man who would delay, does he?”

“No—but a day or two . . .”

He shook his head.

“No. He will come to-night. The week is up. Besides, why should he wait longer? Why should you wish it? You are not usually a procrastinating man. As for me, I’m not sorry to end it anyway. I want to feel like a man again. This spy’s life goes against the grain. It makes me hate myself.”

“You think the part we have been playing a dishonourable one?”

“Damned dishonourable! Forgive me, old man, I can’t help it. It makes it all the worse that I can’t associate the idea of dishonour or even of unfairness with either father or you. You know what father is to me? And yet this week I have been ashamed to think of him.”

His tone was so wretched that whatever anger I might have felt quickly evaporated.

“You are foolish,” I said briefly. “It seems to me that your viewpoint is becoming morbid. Do you call the physician who anxiously examines a patient, watching day by day for the development of dreaded symptoms, a spy? Let us cut all feeling out of this tangle and see how it looks. That is, if you wish to listen to reason?”

“First of all, then, there is your father; the fairest-minded man, the finest gentleman that I know. He is absolutely devoted to your happiness. His

work, however absorbing, has always taken second place where you were concerned. Would a father like that be likely to prove unfair or unjust when the question is one which is to affect your whole life—the question of your marriage?”

“I told you—”

“You told me that for the past week you have been ashamed to think of him. And for what? Because he is trying to make sure of your happiness! One day you come to him and tell him that you wish to marry a young girl, charming in herself, but with antecedents whom your father, as a scientist, views with something very like horror. What does he do? Forbid the marriage? Render it impossible by refusing you the necessary start in life? Threaten you with the loss of what you value more than money, his love? Nothing of the kind. He merely asks you for a week during which he may satisfy himself that the young lady is free from any visible taint of her undesirable ancestry. Even in this, he is generosity itself, for in taking my opinion he knows that if it were to be biased the bias would be in your favour.”

“He knows very well that your professional opinion will not be biased,” said Harold, “and so do I.”

We walked the length of the verandah without speaking.

“You professional folk think that no layman’s opinion is worth a bag of beans,” began Harold at last, “but it may be, for all that! I have always thought that too much is made of ancestry. Alix herself is a proof of it. Granting that her mother and her grandmother were at least psychics—”

“Mediums,” I amended.

“Mediums, if you like. Alix is not a medium, never has been; never will be. Of course, I can partially understand my father. He has hated such things all his life. Has been actively hostile, in fact. And the news of his son marrying into a mediumistic family might raise a smile amongst his colleagues. But I really thought he was too broad-minded to feel a little thing like that.”

“You think it a little thing? Well, you may be right. But at any rate your father would not consider his own feelings in his decision. You are unfair. Love is having a strange effect upon you, old man! You are acting like a sulky child.”

“I know. I see it myself. But you all seem to be making such a fuss over nothing. To me everything seems nothing in comparison with Alix. Another

strange effect of love, I suppose?” He smiled whimsically, and then, straightening up, he looked me squarely in the eyes.

“Well—what is your professional opinion going to be?”

Alas, with all my hardening of heart, it was not hard enough! I—hesitated.

“When your father comes—” I began.

“It means more to me than to my father.”

“Yes. But his judgment—”

“In this matter my father takes your judgment, Mack,” his tone changed and he laid his hand affectionately upon my shoulder, “you are not going to make me wait any longer, are you?”

“No—no. But I wish to God you had asked me your question yesterday, Harold! I could have answered you then glibly enough. Now—it’s harder.”

As my agitation increased, he became cool.

“Yesterday? Then something has happened since yesterday? I thought so. It must have been this morning. Your manner at lunch was different. You were worried, distrait. You appeared even nervous, although a specialist in your line is not supposed to possess nerves.”

The trace of contempt in his voice braced me.

“He ought not to give way to them, at any rate! But you are right. My affection for you has had a deleterious effect. You are right also in your other conclusion. Something did happen this morning. Something so strange that it was strange even to me who am used to strange things.”

“Yes?” Harold’s tone was sharp with suspense. With a nervous gesture he pushed two chairs closer together and seated himself with a certain dogged resolution. “Sit here, will you? And now, let’s have it!”

I took the other chair more slowly.

“I need scarcely tell you,” I said, “that I have no feeling in this case such as has troubled you. I am here in my professional capacity, a pathological specialist. As such I have been observing your fiancée. I do not call it spying—although you may call it so if you choose. Until this morning I had discovered nothing which could cause me the slightest professional anxiety. I have found Miss Alix lovely and charming. She is not a robust woman, but

she is thoroughly healthy. Indeed, she tells me that she knows practically nothing of pain. She has never had a serious illness in her life—”

“Yes,” broke in Harold eagerly, “and you know she has simply no nerves. I have known her to be quite calm when many another girl would have had a fit of hysterics. That is why it seems so utterly absurd to connect her in any way with that class of nervous, highly-strung, excitable people whom we call psychics.”

“Who told you that psychics are nervous and highly-strung and excitable?”

“Well, everyone knows that they are.”

“Then everyone knows wrong. People of that temperament often cultivate such a popular misconception. Many a little, useless bit of hysterical humanity tries to excuse her lack of ordinary self-control upon the ground of ‘psychic temperament.’ But the real psychic temperament is quite different. It is essentially calm, contemplative, abstracted, dreamy, hard to arouse—”

Harold pushed back his chair with a violent scraping. “Oh, go on! Make out a case to fit!”

“The case is already made. It is you who are fitting it. Doubtless you have noticed in Miss Alix, without knowing it, many evidences of the psychic temperament. You have noticed how often she will sit with her hands in her lap and gaze far away. If you have ever asked her of what she has been thinking she has probably told you that she did not know. As a matter of fact, she had not been thinking consciously, at all.”

“Well?”

“Well—it is only another step along that same line and we have—trance.”

“I’ll not believe you!”

“It is a big step, I grant you. In nine cases out of ten the subject never takes it. I am glad to admit that fact. The odds are heavily against it, especially if the health be normal. This is so true that I did not even intend to mention the possibility to your father. All my other observations led me to believe that the slight inheritance which Miss Alix had received from her mediumistic family might be safely neglected. I had entirely justified my position to myself. Nine out of ten is such a large percentage—”

“Then it is all right? Why did you frighten me—”

“My dear fellow! Since yesterday I have found out that Miss Alix is—the tenth case.”

I had expected an outburst, but none came. Harold was absolutely silent. His face looked very white against the dusk. In the quiet we could hear a woman singing, and, far away, the whistle of a train.

“That will be your father’s train,” I remarked in as casual a tone as I could manage.

“Yes. Dad will be here in ten minutes. The motor is a flyer and Dad drives fast. But ten minutes will be enough for you to tell me—what you must.”

To my surprise, the defiance, the smouldering anger, had died out of his voice. He spoke in his ordinary tone. A warm impulse of admiration stirred me for he was meeting this crisis as I like to see a man meet trouble.

“I can tell you in a few words,” I said. “This morning Miss Alix had promised me a walk after breakfast. When I asked for her, one of the maids directed me to the rose garden. I found her there sitting on the little green bench, the one which faces the south wall. You know it?”

“It is a favourite seat of hers.”

“She was there this morning, leaning back, her hands clasped in her lap, as she so often sits. Her wide, vague gaze was fixed upon the old red wall where the crimson rambler is. She looked the very spirit of the garden and for a moment I hesitated to spoil the picture. But I wanted my walk—and there was something in the absolute quiet of her pose that made me suddenly uneasy. However, I did not speak, but sat down beside her, waiting until she should turn to me. You know her slow, graceful movements and her way of half-turning with that subtle smile of hers—”

“Yes, yes. Go on.”

“Well, this time she did not turn. She paid absolutely no attention to me. I spoke to her—some commonplace reminder of our promised walk. She did not answer. Then, laughingly, as one might try to arouse a child, I placed my hand over her clasped ones. Immediately I was conscious of a shock! Her hands were deathly cold—and not only cold, but *dead*. That mysterious something which animates our clay, yet which belongs to it so little, was missing from those hands. I could not be mistaken. I know the *absence* of that something so well. My fingers closed upon the hands of Alix as they might close upon a stone. I scarcely needed to look into her fixed yet

sightless eyes to learn all that I needed to know. But, to make absolutely sure—I tried all the usual tests. She was undoubtedly in a state of trance.”

I paused for a moment, but Harold, whose white face was now shaded by his hand, made no response. I went on in a more practical tone:

“The state in which I found Miss Alix is common enough amongst those peculiarly constituted people whom we call mediums. I have seen it again and again. But now comes the surprising part of the story; the part which has made this morning’s experience the strangest of the many strange happenings in my life. (I shall not attempt to explain it save upon the general lines of that wireless telegraphy of the mind which we call telepathy). Seeing the state in which your fiancee was, I sat quietly beside her waiting until she should awaken, for, as you know, it is never safe to rudely arouse a trance-sleeper. In order that I might detect the earliest signs of returning consciousness, I placed one hand upon her waist and the other upon her head near the temple, and, without definitely intending it, my gaze followed hers and became focused upon the same place—the old red wall where the crimson Rambler is. We may have been sitting like this for fifteen minutes when, without any shock of surprise or strangeness, I noticed that the crimson Rambler was no longer climbing up the wall. The wall, in the spot where it had been, was quite bare, and set into it, in the most natural manner possible, was a small green gate with an arched top. While I gazed, mildly interested, the green gate swung back and a young girl came through the opening. She closed the gate silently and, as she turned, I saw that it was Alix. I did not notice anything strange in this, and as she came up the walk toward me, I arose to greet her. As I did so, I removed my hands from contact with the real Alix beside me—instantly the illusion (or whatever you like to call it) passed! I turned to find Alix awake and looking at me inquiringly.”

Harold sprang to his feet excitedly.

“And you, a man of sense, are going to offer that bally rot as evidence!” he exclaimed. “Why, man, you were dreaming— And Alix, too, had merely fallen asleep in the sunshine!”

“You think that! Well, ask Alix. Or rather, listen to me, for I can tell you the facts as she told them to me. You remember that the girl herself knows nothing of her dead mother’s abnormality. The aunt who brought her up hated it, I gather, almost as much as your father. So Alix has no past history to teach her what any peculiar experience may mean. I asked her if she had

been asleep. She said, ‘No,’ and then blushed and added, ‘Well, perhaps I was! At least I have been taking one of my dream-journeys.’”

“Tell me about the dream-journey?” I asked.

“She told me, quite simply. She had come into the garden, she said, for some roses, and had seated herself upon the bench to wait for me. She was admiring the crimson Rambler on the south wall. Then the rose-bush seemed to fade away and she noticed what she had never seen before, a dear little green gate in the wall. It was as real as the roses had been and she opened it to see what was on the other side. When she passed through she found herself in a delightful park—a park which she had never seen. She did not wander very far, however, for she thought she heard my voice telling her to come back. So she had come back through the green gate—to find me waiting.”

“But how,” I asked her, “did you know that your experience was a dream-journey and not a reality?”

She laughed frankly. “I did not know it,” she said. “I thought it was quite real until I sat down upon the bench again and saw you standing there. Then I looked for the green gate to point it out to you—and there is no green gate there—as you can see for yourself!”

I tried to laugh with her, but I fear it was not a success, for she looked a little startled.

“And have you ever had this dream-journey experience before?” I asked her.

“Oh, yes,” she said, “quite often. Not the same dream, but the same sense of wonder upon awakening to find that my experience had not been real. For you know,” she added, “all the things which I see and do are quite, quite real. It is not like dreaming at all.” I asked her why she had never spoken of her dreams, but she seemed puzzled and said, “Are they so very strange, then?”

“And you think—?” Harold’s voice was very low.

“I think, old man, that you will have to face the truth. Your little Alix is a genuine psychic.”

He stood up, then, and squared his broad shoulders.

“Very well! It would seem,” with a little wry smile, “that the worst has happened. It will be a hard blow for poor old Dad. As for you, Mack, I know I have been infernally rude, but a fellow in suspense is hardly responsible. I

beg your pardon. I know that you have only done your duty as a man is bound to do!" He laughed a little at the old school quotation and offered me his hand.

I took it wonderingly. It was as firm as a rock.

"But, Harold boy, are you sure you understand? Your father—"

"I know." His face quivered. "Dad has always been the only one that mattered. But we've got to face the facts. The time has come when there is some one who matters—more!"

"You mean—you will risk this marriage?"

"My dear chap, for Alix I would risk—hell!"

TTrue love is a great smoother of roads—our immortal William to the contrary notwithstanding. When a man is willing to risk hell for a woman the chances are in his favour. In the course of true love obstacles do not exist, the true lover is more effectual than an army with banners. In the case of Harold and Alix love did her golden best. Even the clear-sighted professor became happily blinded by the glamour and began to wonder why he had opposed a match so eminently blest. I myself was present at the wedding, and when my glance and the professor's met we smiled perseveringly. Perhaps we were both afraid to cease smiling lest the skeleton in the closet might rattle its bones.

But the skeleton's time had not yet come. So silent was he that Harold openly scoffed at him and, I think, began to look upon me in the light of a solemn old croaker who had been needlessly alarmed by a trifle.

"Alix hardly ever dreams now!" he told me, triumphantly, some months after the wedding. I looked up with a quick twinge of fear. It seemed already that the skeleton was stirring!

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that she still allows herself to dream at all! Did you not give her my warning? as you promised!"

"Er—yes—I warned her. I told her you thought she had better not give in to it. And, of course, she doesn't. But once in a while she has these odd little experiences—quite charming some of them are. She tells me about them afterwards. Of course, we say nothing to father. His attitude is as incomprehensible as ever. I never could understand how a broad-minded man like him can refuse to recognize certain possibilities. 'There are more things in heaven and earth—' "

“Spare me! Spare me that particular quotation, please! Can’t you see that it is because your father does admit certain possibilities, does believe that there are ‘more things in heaven and earth’ that he is so anxious? May not these things bring evil as well as good? What if your father’s knowledge leads him to suspect that the good is problematical, the evil sure? At least that is what I believe. If I wished I could terrify you with tales of poor unfortunates who have been burned at this same fire. Ignorant meddlers, who believed themselves gods, have come to me for help—help which often I have been unable to give. Let me tell you, Harold, that your wife is playing with edged tools.”

“I simply can’t see it, Mack!”

“No. You are wilfully blind. But I will warn you this once more. If Alix persists in giving way to these trance-states she is in grave danger. No one believes more firmly than I that there may be another world, close to, interpenetrating perhaps, our normal realities. But that other world is not for us. We enter it at our peril. As you love your wife, I caution you not to let her stray within its borders.”

He left me with a troubled face; but a depressing sense of failure told me that he was far from being as seriously impressed as I had hoped. I had made him uncomfortable, but I had not made him afraid.

After this we did not meet for more than a year. My work claimed me more and more and he was happy with Alix in their pretty country home. When I saw him again it was with the shadow of life heavy upon him; for within that year, he had been a father, and now he was a father who had lost his son. The child, a beautiful boy, had lived but three months. Harold could not speak of him. He was the type of man who worships children and his great loss left him dumb. It was the professor who told me details of the sad little drama, adding that Harold had sobered suddenly and that Alix could not be aroused from an enveloping despair. Then, at the end of our interview, the skeleton came forth boldly and rattled his bones.

“I am afraid for her now, as I have never been before!” he told me. “I need not tell you how such a state of depression superinduces that in which we have reason to fear. You have influence with Harold. If you could do anything—warn her through him, I should be grateful.”

“I will do what I can,” I told him, and it was with this promise weighing rather heavily upon me that I found myself once more a guest in the house of my friend.

There was no need for spying this time. The truth was plain for all to see. I had not been an hour in that atmosphere before I shared the Professor's fears. I spoke to Harold at once and he heard me more patiently than before, but when I had finished he shook his head.

"You do not understand, old man!" he said. "These harmless psychic experiences are all that she has now. Since the boy died they are her only comfort. How can I forbid her to find peace where she can?"

My anxiety inclined me to be rather brutal. "And if she had taken to drinking absinthe to forget her grief would you allow her to find peace that way?" I asked. "Or would you try to save her for her own sake as well as yours? Great heavens, man, rouse yourself! Don't you recognize the danger —"

"Hush! Here she is."

As he spoke Alix came in. Prepared as I was, I was shocked at the change in her. I had seen her last a lovely, graceful girl, dreamy-eyed, sweet-lipped, full of the pulsing tide of life. I saw her now, a grief-stricken woman, languid, unsmiling, with all the strength and glory of her youth burned out. She came forward, hesitatingly, offering me a lifeless hand. Her once firm lips were trembling, her serene eyes were now restless and vague. She had a curious look of one who is always listening. What did she hear?

As I talked to her, the impression strengthened. She seemed to catch scarcely half of my remarks, and often answered at random. One might have thought her partially deaf—save for that listening look! With her husband it was the same, and if one of us addressed her suddenly she would turn with a start as if our speech had interrupted some other and more engrossing conversation.

There was little that I could do, but I did what I could. Disregarding Harold, I spoke to Alix herself. She would not listen, but perhaps the suggestion of blame worked upon her conscience, for one morning toward the end of my stay she came to me of her own accord. I was sitting in the rose garden—although the roses were now a thing of the past. There were dead leaves upon the paths and only the bare bones of the crimson rambler clung to the old red wall. Alix came and sat down beside me.

"Do you remember the little green gate, Doctor?" she said. "I have often found my way through it since. Do you know, I have discovered an odd coincidence; there really was a gate there years and years ago—long and long before the Professor bought this place. There is a story about it. It

entered into a park, just like it does in my dream. The park, the story says, belonged to a very evil man and he made love to a young girl who lived in this very house. She eloped with him, through that gate! He was to marry her, but he never did. She never came home.”

“A sad little story, Alix.”

“Yes. But true, I’m sure. I have often seen her wandering in the park, always alone. I have never spoken to her. She seems too sad to talk.”

“Alix,” I said. “If you will not listen to me, will you not listen to Harold?”

“No. For he will not ask me to. You are wrong. You are all wrong. That is what I want to explain to you before you go. Should not I be the best judge? It is because I want you to stop worrying Harold about me that I am going to tell you something, something wonderful! You know that I thought I could not live when my baby died. I love Harold, but I must be one of those women who love children better than husbands. And my baby was so beautiful—” She broke off and sat gazing before her in the old way with her clasped hands in her lap.

“Go on,” I urged her gently.

“For all my despair, I never could believe that he was really gone. It did not seem possible. I was always expecting to find him somewhere, perhaps in one of my dream-journeys. But I never did. Then, just as I was almost wild with the pain of disappointment, relief came. I heard my baby’s voice.”

“What!”

“I heard him call me. It was quite plain. He called, ‘Mother.’ ”

There was silence after this. Alix had said all that she had come to say, and the pathetic horror of the thing had left me speechless. No doubt, now, that the Professor’s worst fears were justified! The poor mother had taken another step along the forbidden road—the road whose end I knew too well. She had become clairaudient as well as clairvoyant. If she lost her self-control now, if she left herself at the mercy of these calling voices, it was only another step to insanity. Already it was possibly too late to appeal to common sense. However, I could but try.

“My dear,” I said at last, and very gravely, “have you ever stopped to think that a three-months-old baby could not say ‘Mother?’ ”

She started. Fear leaped into her wide eyes. But I went on:

“I do not wonder at all that you feel that your little boy is not lost to you. He is probably nearer than you dream. For a time at least, I have always liked to fancy, the dead are not remote from the living who love them. As time goes on, the distance (if we can speak of distance as belonging to that other world) may widen. Who would wish to hold a freed soul close to earth? Progression is probably the great law there as here. And if that be so, might it not naturally happen that in a spiritual world the least spiritual would linger longest near the earth and perhaps be the most eager to seize a chance to get into touch with the old earth-life? I believe that there are many such unhappy beings, earthbound by the baseness of their nature, who are ever on the alert to seize such abnormal opportunities as you—forgive me, my dear—are offering them! Most physicians would tell you that the voice you hear is no voice, but rather a delusion born of jangled nerves. I used to think that way, but of late years I have come to recognize other possibilities. Not for one moment do I think that the voice you heard was the voice of your child. He was a baby here, he is a baby there. One does not grow up suddenly because one dies. But I do believe that you may hear a voice calling you. A lying voice, a haunting voice, a voice which even now is draining your life away. I have seen such cases before. Do you not hear the voice at any time and under any circumstances? Is it not becoming more and more persistent? Does it not rouse you from sleep, prevent you from fixing your thoughts upon any occupation, interrupt the most important conversation?”

“Yes.” Alix was very white. “It does all that. But do you think I grudge sleep or ease, or—anything—if I can hear my baby’s voice?”

“Ah—if it *is* your baby’s voice!”

“Could I be mistaken? When every nerve has ached for it so long?”

“For that very reason, if for no other! It is so easy to believe what we wish to believe. I know of an old couple who lost their only son, a sailor, whom they adored. They began to get messages from him on the planchette. They were very religious people and they looked upon the messages as a special favour of God. Then they began to hear the son’s voice. They were in ecstasy—a miracle had been vouchsafed for their comforting! But before long the messages delivered by the beloved voice changed. From being sweet, hopeful, pious, they became vulgar, shocking, blasphemous! The poor old creatures were forced to listen to words and thoughts so vile that their clean souls sickened. Yet it was the same voice! Imagine their state if you can! They had no peace left in life, no hope in death. There was no

room in the universe for anything save that wicked voice. They are both dead now—they died in an asylum for the insane.”

“What a horrible story! But—they were really insane, weren’t they?”

“No more insane than you are when you hear the voice that speaks to you!”

I had aroused her now! She sprang up with flashing eyes, and for the moment she was the girl Alix again.

“How dare you!”

“I would dare more than your anger for Harold’s sake—and yours.”

“And I have listened to you because you are Harold’s friend. But you have surely exceeded the limit of forbearance. I shall not see you again while you remain in this house.”

Her brief excitement scarcely sustained her to the end of her speech. The quickly-kindled fire burned out, and even as she turned from me the unnatural lassitude had settled down again.

I returned to town by the next train. I could do no more. The end of Harold’s brief romance seemed inevitable—would have been inevitable, I believe, had Alix hated me as much as she thought she did. But fortunately, trust had been sown before fear and liking before anger. Deep down in her consciousness Alix knew that I was her friend and that I loved Harold. Knowledge like that is hard to uproot. A little temper will not do it! So it happened that when the Great Fear came to her she turned to me for help.

One day in the middle of December I found her waiting for me in my office. She looked white, breathless, hunted! Yet with it all she attempted to appear as usual. A chair beside her was littered with little parcels—the ostensible reasons for her presence in town.

My assistant, who was a discerning man, was talking cheerfully about the pleasant trouble of buying Christmas presents, but upon my entrance he departed with remarkable alacrity.

“My dear Alix!”

She looked at me—a look of long questioning. What she expected to see in my face I do not know, but I know what she saw there. And apparently it was enough, for with a little gasping sigh of relief she let all her hardheld self-restraint drop from her and leaning her head upon my desk found the relief of tears.

I let her have her cry out. Hysteria was a small thing beside what I might have to face later.

“And now tell me all about it, Alix.”

She lifted her head.

“I will,” she said. “But there is no need, is there? You knew it all long ago. It has all happened as you said. I didn’t believe you. I could not. But it has all happened. Am I insane, do you think! I think I must be. I know I will be soon. But there is something left yet—the sense to realize the danger. I know you will save me if you can, doctor. But—can you!”

I did not dare to let the shadow of doubt creep into my face. Instead, I answered promptly:

“Your being here is proof enough of that. How far has the trouble gone?”

She shuddered. It was only by a great effort that she controlled herself at all—yet it was something that she could make the effort.

“The worst came last night. Last night the voices (there are many of them now) woke me and told me to murder Harold! Murder my husband—” she began to laugh—

“Stop that!” I commanded. She forced herself to obey, and after a moment’s pause went on with her story. There is no need to detail it here. It was similar to so many others. At first the voices had comforted, soothed, promised; then other voices had come, all good voices, soothing, comforting, promising. But she had little rest. Her sleep was broken. She could concentrate on nothing. She shrank from all company—even Harold, since he so often interrupted the voices. Then, gradually, came a change. The voices jeered a little, suggested morbid thoughts, laughed at sacred things! She had been frightened and had tried to shut them out, without avail. As her fear became greater, the power of the voices waxed. They haunted, tormented, shamed her! God knows what that pure-souled, sensitive woman suffered—utterly helpless in their evil power!

She was slowly dying from the torture of it all—when the last, crowning fear was added, the suggestion of murder!

“If you cannot help me (and I want you to be quite honest with me) I shall kill myself,” she said when she had finished. “Otherwise some day I shall go quite mad. The voices will command and I shall obey.”

Never in my life have I felt so helpless! I knew only too well that her only chance lay within herself—a chance indeed, but how fearfully small!

“I can teach you,” I said slowly, “how to save yourself. It will be a long fight and a hard one. But I believe you can win out.”

“Tell me,” she said briefly. “You will find me a good fighter.”

Even then I doubted. I was afraid. But she was plucky and—there was certainly a chance.

We did not waste a day. Harold, only partially realizing, took her away, and I went with them. We travelled incessantly. We were busily occupied all day and as tired out at night as we could possibly contrive. Alix knew that she was working for her very life. She studied German, she studied Spanish. She bought a camera and taught herself photography. She devoted herself, body and soul, to any fad or fancy whose mastering demanded the keen attention of the moment. She read. She forced herself to read, and to understand what she read. I have seen her whole face blanched and wet with the effort to read attentively a single page. It was years, she told me, since she had cared to read a book, however fascinating, and of late she had been utterly unable to do it. The habit of concentration seemed utterly broken.

But the power was not quite lost—and that was the key-note of the cure, concentration, and again concentration. Alix must win back her own stolen thoughts, must become once more mistress of her own mind. The voices might call, but they must not be listened to. No blank moment must be left for the insidious trance to seize upon. If she was awakened from sleep, there was always something ready, some occupation, some work upon which she must concentrate. She was in the position of one who with all her strength tries to shut-to an open door! Against what powers she struggled who shall say? But slowly, slowly, the door began to yield! Sometimes it sprang wide open again. But Alix never despaired. She was clear grit. And she grew stronger with each effort. The forces of her being rallied and pushed with her against that open door. “For Harold’s sake, for my dead child’s sake!” she would whisper—and the door began to close!

Prayer, I think, was a powerful factor in the closing of that unlawfully opened door. Alix had a wonderful faith. When the outside pressure became too great, fresh strength came from somewhere, and little by little a vantage was gained and kept.

But it was slow. Oh, it was slow! I stayed with her until to stay longer was impossible. But I left her with hope in my heart. I felt sure, now, that she would win out. I scorned myself for ever having doubted, but who could have guessed the reserve power in that one frail woman.

She never wrote to me any news of the battle. To speak of it, to think of it, might be to give the Outside a vantage—and she dared not risk a millionth of an inch. Then one day, months after my return, she wired me one word, “Come.”

I went to her as fast as train could carry me. It meant, I knew, that the final fight was on. How the trains crawled, how every moment dragged. I could not eat, sleep fled from me—and after all, I came too late. Alix had fought her Waterloo and had won! I found her, worn out in body but supremely happy. The voices were silenced, the door was shut!

Harold, more like the old Harold than he had been for long, took me by the hand with a grip that hurt. Although he had never realized just how the powers of darkness had fought for his wife’s pure soul, he knew that she had been delivered from some great danger, and he knew that I knew it. Yet with the intense reserve of the true-born Briton, we put it all in our handclasp and left it out of our talk.

We stood looking down at Alix as she lay on her couch in the sunshine.

“She says she is all better,” said Harold, a little doubtful, “and yet, she is too weak to walk alone. I want the opinion of her Majesty’s physician.”

Alix smiled up at us both.

“It is all right,” she said, “the doctor understands,

For things like this, you know, must be
After a famous victory!

and, doctor, I want to go home!”

Never was glorious victory celebrated in plainer phrase.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

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[The end of *The Green Gate* by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay]