

morning. I was rather extravagant over it. I suppose it wouldn't be quite fair to ask you to take it?"

"Let me see it," said she. He took it out of his pocket. It was a thick gold ring set with a large sapphire and two diamonds, just a broad band such as a man might wear.

"Put it on your own finger," she said; "and if you are able to come back, you can give it to me then."

"I wish you could have taken it," he said, "even if you wouldn't wear it."

"What's the good of having a thing I can't wear? Look here, what is that little silver heart you wear on your watch-chain? It's an absurd thing for a man to wear."

"That! Oh, it has no tender memories. My old nurse gave it to me when I was a mere boy and had my first watch and chain. She got it in India somewhere. Her husband was a soldier, and she had followed the drum with him all over the world. She's dead and gone years ago. Will you have it?"

"Yes, I could take that. Nobody would ask questions. I'll put it on one of my silver bangles, and it will be something to remind me of you when you are gone."

It was wonderful how stoical these two young people were. Anybody listening to their conversation would have thought that they were quite indifferent as to whether they met again or not; but there is an indifference which covers a tragedy of suffering. Madeline stayed in the old Dutch summer-house until the winter dusk was falling, and they said good-bye to each other—a literal good-bye—and then they tore themselves apart, and the girl went home alone with all her love frozen at the fountain head, and the man turned back into the summer-house and sat there motionless until the calls of the gardeners to clear the grounds roused him and made him, too, seek the shelter of his hotel.

Oh, these partings! Oh, the bitter black blank of looking forward over years which must be unilluminated by the smile of the only one who makes life worth living! Oh, the wrenching apart of twin souls, the tearing asunder of true affinities! Well, well, parting is always the same all the world over. Men and women who believe themselves very much in love suffer just as much in parting as those whose hearts have been unshaken for all time; but oh, the difference in the years that follow! Oh, the length of the years when the heart is elsewhere than with the body. The wrench of parting is as the drawing of a tooth—agony for the moment—but it is the everlasting pain which sometimes follows which frets away youth as moth doth fret out a garment.

Madeline Desmond went straight home from the Winter Garden. She found her mother alone. It was not a very usual circumstance that Mrs Desmond should be alone at that hour, but the other girls had gone their different ways, and Mrs Desmond, who was suffering from a chill, was in the house alone.

"I want to tell you, mother," said Madeline, when she had thrown aside her wraps and had taken her cup of tea from her mother's hand, "that I've been with Ralph this afternoon."

"Yes?" Mrs Desmond looked up sharply.

"I've told him that it is quite impossible for us to be engaged."

"You have not tied yourself in any way?"

"Not in any way, mother—neither he nor I."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Desmond, "you won't regret this. If he goes away and forgets, it is better that you should know now—at least, you will find it better that you have not waited. It is such a slur on a woman to be plighted for years and forsaken. You can't hide an engagement; you can't explain it away when it's broken as Jacob broke his."

"Is his name Jacob—his real name?" She asked the question not because she wanted to know, but because she wanted to draw the conversation away somewhat from her own case.

"No. His name—I don't feel inclined to tell you. It wouldn't do you any good to know it. I would rather never stain my lips by uttering it. His name is well known. He is a highly honoured man in a distinguished position."

"Is he happy?"

"How could such a man be happy? I never saw—Leah until that night last season. I looked at him for an instant, just enough to convey to him that he was not to dare to speak to me, and then I turned, and I looked at her from head to foot, and I looked back at him. One glance at his scarlet face, although they've been married for twenty years, was enough to show me what kind of happiness is his portion. Whatever it is, it's more than he deserves."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," said Madeline; "I quite agree with you, mother. And now will you do something for me?"

"If I can." "I want you to regard the incident as closed. Please don't speak about it. The girls don't know that he had any serious idea of marrying me, and if I'm not worried about it, I shall get over it—at all events, it won't hurt quite so much."

"I haven't spoken of it to a soul, Madeline," said Mrs. Desmond, keeping her eyes very intently upon her cup, which she was engaged in filling, "and I shouldn't dream of speaking of your private affairs to your sisters, any more than I should, under similar circumstances, of theirs to you. You may trust me, Madeline. I know that I must have seemed hard and worldly to you. I don't like you to feel that I am that."

"I haven't said so," said Madeline. "So you told me last night. You haven't said so, but you haven't yet told me that you haven't thought so."

"I don't think," said Madeline, "that I have even thought it. I—I could talk to you better in a year's time, or a month, or a week. Just now I am sore and hurt. I feel like the child who wanted to buy the jeweller's shop with half a crown. You must give me a little while to get over it, and to get back to my natural state of—"

"Of what?" said the mother almost piteously.

"Well, perhaps of unfeelingness. At all events," she went on, "I can tell you this for your comfort, mother—that I would rather you have told me all that was in your mind; I would rather that you, having such a story in your own experience, should tell me the truth. Girls aren't told enough of the truth

now-a-days—I don't know why they used to be. According to tradition, a girl was like a sheet of white paper until she was married. I don't know how it worked. It doesn't work now. I suppose the new condition of things has altered everything, but I know that I would rather be told the very worst than be let merely to take my chance of what might or might not happen to me. And I'll never reproach you, mother, come what may."

After that evening the mother and daughter never reverted to the subject of Ralph Byrne. He called and left a card with a small "P.P.C." in the corner when he knew that Mrs. Desmond would not be at home; and then he turned his back upon Blankhampton, that quaint old city of churches and ancient buildings, and went back to the busy life from which he had come.

And time went on. Time, how much of it? Does it matter? Time is, or should be, according to how you measure it. At the bar, where Ralph Byrne was wooing fortune, fifteen years is looked upon as a mere apprenticeship. As a matter of fact, five whole years had gone by since Madeline Desmond and Ralph Byrne had parted in the old Dutch summer house in the Winter Garden at Blankhampton; five long years, during which not one word had come to tell her that he remembered her existence.

"My dear Madeline," said Mrs. Desmond one day. "Do you think you are wise to refuse Major Endicott?"

"Oh, I don't know, mother. Perhaps I am not very wise. I don't mean to marry him, if that's what you want to know."

"But why not? He's so nice, so wealthy, so well-born."

"Yes, I know dear; but he doesn't suit me."

"It seems such a pity," said Mrs. Desmond, wistfully. "Not that I would persuade you, Madeline, not at all; only you are four-and-twenty."

"And if I were four-and-thirty, or four-and-forty, I should say the same. He's very fine and large, mother, but he's not for me—most emphatically not for me, darling. You have got your Georgie married, and Lenore married, and little Avis; it won't be long before Jose follows the example of Avis, and then you'll have nobody but me to look after you and see that you are comfortable and happy, and that you get a good time. Don't you think you and I were made for each other?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Desmond, shortly. "When you are married I look forward to having a very gay time. I shall have five married daughters to visit me, and five sets of grandchildren to visit me. I shall have the gayest time that I have ever had in my life. The idea of two lone women in a big house like this is too terrible."

"But, dear, you have four married daughters to visit now, and we shall have four sets of grandchildren to visit us."

"It's no use talking to me, Madeline. I should like you to marry, but not until you meet the right man."

"When I meet the right man I'll marry him, I promise you. Have another egg?"

"No, thanks."

"Have some poited shrimps, or some of this foie gras?"

"A little of the foie gras," said Mrs. Desmond. "Oh, is that you, Jose? Well, you are late."

"Yes, dear, I am very late," said Jose, in a small, meek voice. "But I was so tired this morning. I danced such a lot last night. I'm sleepy yet."

"My dear child, you should have slept yourself out and had your breakfast in bed. Did you really have a good time?"

While the two were discussing the previous evening's dance Madeline picked up the newspaper. The first words that struck her were those at the head of a column, "A Silver Heart."

She put the paper down as if she had been stung. Oh, why did she ever think about him! Why did she carry that silver heart always on her left wrist? Because she was a fool, a fool. It was the old story of Jacob and Rachel over again. No, she wouldn't be weak; it was against her principles to be weak. She was a strong woman.

So she took up the newspaper again, and saw that "The Silver Heart" was the title of a play, a play that had been produced the previous evening in London, a play that had taken the world by storm, a play by an utterly unknown author, an author who had no nom de guerre, who did not appear at the production in response to the calls of "Author!" who preferred to keep his identity an absolute secret.

"There's some lucky Madeline somewhere," she said to herself as she put the paper down.

And where was the lucky Madeline? Well, as a matter of fact, she happened to very morning to be walking down St. Thomas' street at Blankhampton. She had half-a-dozen commissions to execute; her mind was intent upon them. She was never on the look-out for young men, as the majority of girls are in cathedral cities, and when somebody stopped and said: "Madeline, don't you know me?" she gave a start—a little cry. "I see," he said, "that you are wearing the silver heart that I gave you. Did you see the paper this morning? I didn't find the Bar quick enough, Madeline. I—I took the silver heart for a gerdoun. I've got there, Madeline! Where are you going? What are you doing? Let's go up to the Dutch summer-house, Madeline, and I'll tell you all about it."

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