

curious vividness. To these word pictures, Morris fell in the way of interposing a sort of letterpress. He had never been to India himself and he enjoyed talking over his work with reference to these bits of fresh local colour. "You ought to tell Mr. Fleming to take up literature," he once remarked.

Elsie laughed. "Oh, I did tell him, but he says writing is such a grind that when he once has me, he doesn't ever want to see ink or paper again. You see he is so tremendously good at riding and shooting and all those things," she explained with pardonable pride. Then she looked uncomfortable. Mr. Morris was not good at those things; indeed, his figure was so ungainly that it almost suggested a deformity.

"I think we had better go on with the Hindustani," he said.

III.

The five years passed at last although in looking forward they had loomed an eternity and even in looking backward they seemed half a lifetime. The time however, had not made much change in either of the young people; indeed, when Jack came again into the old panelled drawing-room, Elsie thought that he looked younger than she remembered him. "Had he always seemed so absurdly boyish?" flashed through her mind. She supposed that the old feeling would come back when he kissed her, which he did after a moment's shy hesitation; to her surprise she remained cold. "It's only because it's strange," she told herself angrily; "I'm so very, very happy, that I can't realise it." She sat down beside him on a sofa and consciously gave herself up to deliberate love-making.

There was no doubt at all as to Jack's feelings, he was evidently completely happy. In the days that followed he could hardly bear Elsie out of his sight, and when he could combine her and ping-pong, he seemed to have reached the summit of earthly felicity. He had come home to find the game at its height and he promptly set to work to become a crack player. Besides it afforded him a pretext for being alone with Elsie, and he could claim a reward or a consolation after each set. They always took the same form.

"I wish you'd talk more about serious things," Elsie said one day during one of these interludes.

"What am I to talk about? Isn't this serious enough?" he laughed, putting his arm around her.

The girl disengaged herself quickly. These endearments had not yet become an unconscious habit and she suddenly felt that she could not bear it. Oh, do talk about other things. Tell me about India and the natives," she urged rather pettishly.

"A lot of lazy beggars, I'm jolly well glad to be quit of them," Jack said lightly, intent on a new serve.

It almost seemed to Elsie during these days that she was missing somebody, but she told herself the idea was absurd. Was not everyone round her whom she cared for? Of course Mr. Morris discreetly kept away, but that was nothing. On other occasions she had not seen him for months and she had never minded very much. What could it be?

At last the first week came to an end and Saturday came round. "Indian mail day," Elsie cried jubilantly as she came down. They all laughed at her, Jack most of all; indeed she laughed at herself. "I do really quite miss not having your letters though," she said after breakfast.

Jack laughed again. "Come and have a go at ping-pong," he said.

Elsie stamped her foot. "I hate ping-pong," she said.

Fleming looked astonished but he did not take umbrage. "Well, it does seem a shame to be indoors on a day like this; let's have some tennis instead."

Elsie followed him unwillingly. She did not want to play. She had got tired of these long days of games and idleness, kisses and chaff. She craved for some more serious conversation that she might bite her intellectual teeth upon. It was exhausting to be in her own company always, but Jack hated to see her read. The vision of months and years of this sort of life came before her suddenly. "Oh, I can't, I can't," she cried.

Fleming turned. He was not very quick in such matters, but when he saw her face, he looked troubled. "What can't you?" he asked.

Elsie had begun to sob. "It's you, it's

your fault, you aren't the same," she moaned.

"The same as what?" Jack's tone was indignant. "Look here, I wish you'd talk sense."

But Elsie would only sob. Suddenly she realised that she was doing him an injustice. He was the same, terribly the same. It was her own development, and Mr. Morris's thoughts that she had read into Jack's letters as well as his own real but extraneous gift of description.

"When you were you were different," she faltered at last.

Jack smiled in a relieved fashion. "Oh, come, I say that's rather funny. You wouldn't like me to be for ever on the spout, would you?" He went up to her.

But Elsie pushed him away. "It's true, it's true it isn't funny. You can't understand anything," she cried incoherently.

"It's that other chap, that chap whom you were always talking about in your letters, he and his rot about native mythology, curse him," Fleming said slowly.

Elsie looked up in genuine astonishment. "What chap?" Then she coloured hotly. "Mr. Morris—why, I never even thought of him in that way. He's ever so old and—and ugly."

Fleming's face cleared. "Didn't you, dear?" he said, but Elsie did not hear him, she had begun to cry again. "Oh, I want you, you," she whispered.

"But that's all right, isn't it, darling?" Fleming again went nearer.

"No, no, no; my you, the one in India. And I shall never find him, never, never," and sobbing she turned and fled into the house.

A fortnight later Jack Fleming went back to India, puzzled and hurt at Elsie's desertion; fortunately he met another pretty girl on board and before they reached Bombay, she had successfully consoled him.

As to Mr. Morris, he stopped the lessons in Hindustani, but he instructed Elsie in many other difficult subjects although love was not one of them; this he did not attempt, for he knew that she had already learnt the lesson perfectly and with another master.

And Elsie did not marry and lived fairly happily ever after; she found many small happinesses and no large sorrows. But she never found her lover again, never, never, never, for he had been only a man of letters.

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