

dren. You know how I have always cared for you—and you have loved me—but I have always missed something in my life. A fuller sympathy. I have never blinded myself for a moment. I have never cared for the people who have cared for me. Always I knew my life was incomplete, and would be, till I found just the one in the world I could care for too. Little Nell," she said entreatingly, "you are grown up—you will be loved—you are a woman—you will be loved—your life is all before you. You will leave me. I am not strong—I do not like to be alone. I need tenderness about me. I am not heroic, and it has been so hard to stand alone all these years.

"Now so much is given, can I turn my back on the sunlight because youth, as youth is called, is over? Do you think one's heart dies with one's youth? I have found a strong, true love, to lean upon. It is not only affection and reverence—it is both, but it is more than these—much more. My children will understand better than older people. I think it is only the old who are cruel to women of my age. Youth is more lenient. At any rate, you two will understand in time. Some day, Nelly dearest, you will know what it is to find love, and, finding it, to meet it and trust it. Be glad for me, if you care for me at all. At eighteen I thought it only came to youth and beauty; now I know it is of all ages, and comes to some early, and some later—not only the lover, but the dear joy of loving in return."

She, the sweet mother, on her knees to her children! All the chivalry in Arthur's nature rose at that moment. He sprang to his feet and gently raised her and kissed her. His young face wetted hers with tears; she threw her arms round him. "My dear boy, my Arthur!"

I, whose heart was bleeding—for was it not Sir Denzil who loved her? gave one sigh. The gentle nature which, with all its recklessness and vivacities, was always child-like, never lost its longing to lean on a faithful heart and be caressed by a faithful hand. She had been petted and surrounded by love all her life. She was right; she was never meant to stand alone. And still I did not speak.

At last she came and stood beside me where I lay. I felt for her as if she were a dear sister to be advised, loved, forgiven. I clasped her closely and then from the lowest depths of my heart a voice seemed telling me that I only loved her the more, because she had found happiness through my suffering. The spirit of the martyr raised me at that moment.

It was Arthur who broke the silence. I saw a look like my father's picture come into his face. The high, strong look of endurance. I had never seen that expression on Arthur's, who was so like mother. I had my father's silence and endurance, but it was beautiful to see how his likeness came out in Arthur, just as mother stood in need of help and pity. It seemed to me as if father himself stood there and pleaded for his wife with me. And he would have pleaded for her could he have known. Dimly, he had understood her sweet, perverse, complex nature, and in the higher intelligence of the After-life would have known she could not live without love. But it is only in dreams that we move closer to our lost beloveds, I cannot imagine they are permitted to be near us in actual life.

"I don't think it is right that our mother should throw herself on our mercy," Arthur said, gravely. "She can't do wrong in our eyes. Nelly; mother disposes of herself as she pleases, and we know she loves us."

What had come to the boy? In the moonlight mystery of the hour he seemed as old as mother. That night made grown up people of Arthur and me; and a girl-like beauty had come upon our mother's face.

"O, my darlings!" she said, standing a little way off, yet holding out her hands to us, "thank you for your love to me. I could not have married if you had told me you could not bear it. It would have broken my heart; but it would have ruined my life to marry against your wishes

And will you like Sir Denzil for my sake. . . . ?"

Again the silence in the room—but it was I who spoke first this time:

"Yes, for your sake I will like Sir Denzil; I like him for loving you and making you happy."

Arthur looked at mother, and then said, in his own boy-voice again: "Well, I don't mind admitting, I like him for his own sake."

CHAPTER VI.

We drove over to Marwood Court next day. Sir Denzil wished mother to settle on her new rooms, and arrange everything according to her fancy.

Sir Denzil was the most courteous

gathered rose after rose till my hands were full; then I came round the green walk to the house. I looked up. A little hand stole out of a lattice window and pulled down a great spray of jessamine flower.

Only six weeks ago! Ah, history repeats itself!

Sir Denzil came out to meet me. "Will you come in, your mother is having tea in the white room, where, you remember, you gathered the jessamine."

"Your mother!"—no longer Lady Lucile.

"Nelly," he said, and he held out his hand in his frank and cordial way. "don't let me ever feel you think she has thrown herself away. It is all so

inakes some natures very quiet. It brought a soft, bewitching gaiety to mother's; she was like perpetual sunshine now joy had come into her life.

As I sat with them and watched them it seemed to me they were exactly suited to each other. He loved to be amused, and so did she; and they could amuse each other. He had a great deal of romance in his nature, and mother inspired romance. And she was so very pretty, with a beauty that would not fade quickly.

A sort of passive acquiescence in their fate and mine came over me. I believe I have a passion for self-sacrifice, and I recognised that this was for the best. I could never have been to him all mother would be. Though

"Not to hope because all is taken. Is the loneliest depth of human pain," there is also a sort of relief in it—the knowledge that the worst is over, and whatever life may bring of sorrow, it will never bring that pain again.

CHAPTER VII.

Two years have passed since my mother's marriage. My Aunt Aileen had asked for me to go abroad with her. My mother consented very reluctantly, but I was glad to go. I heard from her constantly, and it was one of the best moments of my life when Sir Denzil wrote to tell me all danger was over, and that their son was born. Then I knew how mother wanted to see me again.

How familiar, and yet how unfamiliar, to walk through the corridors of Marwood Court, and hear my mother's voice calling, "Is it Nelly?"

And to find her all alone in the panelled room, and to be clasped in her arms, and to be told over and over again how she had missed me. She was just the same, only more lovely it seemed to me; and perhaps she looked more fragile; but a content beyond all expression showed itself in her soft ways and words.

There was a wild March wind blowing outside, and the flowerless branches of that jessamine beat against the windows fretfully. The fire was burning brightly and the room was full of the scent of heliotrope. She raised her head as a step came down the passage. She did not know how my heart stopped beating and sank down to nothingness!

"It is Denzil," she said, as she went forward to meet him, holding out her hands.

Denzil did not see me, as I was sitting far back on the sofa in the recess. And I had strength enough to thank God that his face, as he came up to her, bore the same look of love as on their wedding day.

"Don't you see Nelly? Nelly," she said; and I came forward. He shook hands with me kindly and told me how lately he had seen my brother Arthur.

Mother went down and whispered something to Denzil before she left the room.

He and I were alone. Then I looked at him to see truly for myself whether in all these long months of Italy and Egypt I had made to myself an ideal of my mother's husband; and by his kind eyes, and every tone of his voice, I knew that he was worthy of the love of two such women as Lucile and her daughter Eleanor. For they have this in common, that neither of them love lightly. Also, as I sat there, I realised that the love of two years ago was dead. Nothing was left but the memory of it. And in its place a thankfulness that the man I had loved had made my mother's happiness.

"Lucile has missed you," he said. "But you are both happy," I answered earnestly.



Scattering the grains out of a basket.

of men, but he forgot me, and did not even look to see if I came into the house or not. I went off to look for my old friend, Mrs Drew. Her manner was mysterious, and she made many unmistakable allusions to Sir Denzil's marriage. She was too discreet to question me. But old servants are never deceived. Mrs Drew was in the storeroom arranging the linen. I had often sat with her before, leaning my elbows listlessly on the window-sills, watching the flights of the white pigeons about the clematis-covered pillars of the verandah running round the square courtyard.

Just then I heard a happy laugh. There was mother scattering the grains out of a basket Sir Denzil held to her. The black kitten was curled up in her arms, the big Newfoundland dog had nestled his head against her. She had forgotten everything but the present, as she looked up to him; and he was just smiling to her. It was one of the many pictures which are sketched on our very souls for us, and the colours do not fade with time.

Mrs Drew looked out, too, and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, after the manner of the Mrs Drews of life. I heard her murmur: "I don't wonder at Sir Denzil. Miss Eleanor, you are not a bit like her ladyship."

Then I knew they went up to the white room, where I had played out the end of my short-loved romance.

I sauntered round the gardens sadly. My only happiness was in thinking: "They are happy; I am thankful mother never guessed anything." I

wonderful to me. You, who love her so much, can understand, that, as yet, I can scarcely realise that she should care for me."

He took off his cap as he spoke of mother, and the sun shone full in his eyes. I never feared for mother's future when I looked at Sir Denzil's eyes.

I took the hand he held out to me, and said very quietly, without a break in my voice, "Mother has not thrown herself away, and besides—she could not. She could never love anyone unless worthy. Always in her life she has chosen the good and refused the evil."

A look came into his eyes, which in a woman's might have turned to tears. Then he spoke very reverently:

"Thank you for what you have said. God grant I may never be unworthy of her. But," he added, "how could a man live beside her and not become more worthy?"

He was very thoughtful as we walked to the house. Intense happiness

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