

# And No More Pain.

By OLIVE WADSLEY.

MADAME LA MARQUISE DE VOEX sat at the head of her table and listened amusedly to the conversation of her guests.

She was not a beautiful woman; but she possessed that indefinable grace, an air of distinction. She looked thoughtfully. She had needed that attribute in her life, and it had stood her in good stead; it had prevented pity, it had restrained scandal, and it had made her, at twenty-six, a personage in Paris, and a renowned hostess.

At the other end of the table, Bosant, the famous playwright, who had just come back after a long absence to his beloved mother-town, was discussing his hostess. His keen face looked sombre as he listened to old Madame de Rameant. "Grand Dieu, what a history!" he murmured, "and what a woman!"

"Eve is a divine creature," her god-mother said in her crisp old voice. "Figure to yourself, mon ami, what she was at eighteen; imagine those eyes with no shadows in their depths. Of course, one cannot discuss such an affair, but I have always believed she loved Robert de Voex. He was a strange creature, half cynic, half idealist, wholly man of the world, the type that women—Heaven help them!—love, and—he left her."

Bosant looked at Madame la Marquise. What was hidden beneath her air of serenity, of gentle indifference? What had not this woman suffered, who had been made the talk of Paris. He imagined her flagellated by the pity of her set stung to uncontrollable bitterness by the sympathy of her friends, a woman scorned—a woman simply—left, after one year of marriage.

His neighbour touched him with her fan.

"You would say—divorce? Pourquoi pas? We have all said it, but Eve is devotee—of the old faith; so she remains, a wife—without a husband."

"And he?" Bosant asked. "What of him?"

"Oh, he—he is in Algiers, they say; and, of course, there is the inevitable addition to the story. For my part I wish he were in heaven; it would at least simplify matters, although one wishes one might consign him openly to a less happy district."

"Why did she marry him?"

Madame de Rameant gave a little snort of scorn.

"Because, cher ami, she shared in common with the rest of us a heart, and was a fool. Voilà tout, and it is without a doubt the reason that will suit all cases, I assure you!"

Bosant laughed.

Madame de Voex's clear voice sounded under the table.

"What is it that you discuss so diligently?" she asked with a little smile. "The foolishness of woman," Bosant answered.

Madame la Marquise laughed gently. "An inexhaustible subject to a man," she said lightly, "and therefore it can be continued in the drawing room."

She rose and led the way down the long picture gallery to a big room decorated in white, with panels of old gold silk let into the wall at intervals. Masses of dark purple irises stood in tall vases, their three spikes standing stiffly out in relief against the white marble mantelpiece and the dark wood of the bureau.

"Sing to us, and delight our souls," Madame de Rameant said with emphasis.

"Sing to us," the crowd echoed.

Eve ran her hands lightly over the keys, then she began to sing a little English song. The words and the music were quite simple, but as she sang them they seemed to hold all the pathos and longing, all the exquisite pain of love:—

Oh, to be heart to heart,

One with the warm June rain;

And no more from the start,

And no more pain.

Bosant, looking at her, saw that her eyes were full of tears; then without speaking she began to play a song of Yvette Guilbert's.

In a moment her guests were laughing, and still amused, they bade her farewell.

She stood alone at last in the big white drawing room, and once again the eternal question faced her, what should she do now?

## II.

She walked slowly to one of the big open windows. Her deeply blue chiffon dress trailed over the rugs with a faint sound. Its colour matched her eyes, her one beauty.

She stood by the window and looked at the world passing by on the pavement outside.

Down the Bois a little breeze eddied and drifted. It was springtime, and the little breeze brought with it all the fragrance of the lilacs, and the hyacinths and narcissi banked up in their loveliness on the stairs below. A plane breeze grew in the big courtyard, and between its young, vividly green leaves the sky showed like little discs of turquoise.

To be lonely—in the springtime. With a sudden, pathetic little gesture Madame la Marquise pressed her hands together, then she turned away and went out of the room.

"I am going to drive," she said to her maid. "Please order the carriage at once, and then dress me quickly."

The woman glanced at the pale, proud face in the mirror as she arranged her mistress's hair.

"Madame is triste to-day," she asked suddenly with a Frenchwoman's intuitive sympathy.

She saw her mistress's eyes turn instinctively to the portrait of a man, the only photograph standing on the large silver dressing-table.

A flush crept up the maid's face. "Dieu! idiot that I am!" she admonished herself fiercely, "to forget that it is exactly seven years ago, to-day since monsieur first left Madame."

Eve de Voex looked long at the face of the man who had married her, tired of her immediately, and left her, within the year.

Like an incoming wave memory swept over her. She lived again the spring morning seven years ago, when her husband, sauntering into her boudoir, had casually informed her that he was leaving for Algiers that evening.

A dumb misery had seized her. Finally she had asked shyly, "Shall you be away long?"

And before he could answer her mother had entered the room.

With dreadful distinctness Eve remembered the scene. Her mother's reprimand, her husband's ironically bitter response. After it was all over, and she was alone, one sentence lived in her mind, tortured it, branded itself for ever on her consciousness.

"I must beg you to remember that my marriage with your daughter was purely an affaire arrange."

Her husband had said that in answer to her mother's taunt. He had imagined she was out of hearing, but her bedroom door was not latched, and the words had penetrated through the distance.

An affaire arrange—and she had meant, afterwards, when they two should be alone, to tell him that if he went away she would go with him—she must go with him, for she loved him.

Her immaturity, her wistful innocence had never allowed her to approach this idol with a too near worship; but now—if Robert were going to leave her—surely it was the time to tell him all that his presence, his nearness, meant to her!

"He is my husband, and since—if he knows I want him, he will not go," she had whispered to herself, and then, like a sudden violent blow in the face, had come that one sentence:

"I must beg you to remember that my marriage with your daughter was purely an affaire arrange."

Then Robert had never loved her? He had married her—for what? Vague memories of marriage settlements, a great heritage for her husband when their two houses should be allied, returned to her mind.

With a little, impotent cry of shame she had realised that he had owned her,

possessed her, and—never loved her.

She had hidden her quivering face in her hands, and had lain motionless for hours, suffering—as, thank Heaven, one only suffers in youth—with that marvellous intensity of agony which is so helpless because so hopeless, so little understood.

It was dark when she had risen at last and had rung for her maid.

The woman listened with amazement to her orders.

The new Paquin frock! Was Madame dining out, attending some big salon? She lifted her eyebrows at the short impatient answer, and in silence waved and perfumed the thick, soft fair hair, and placed the historic string of sapphires round her mistress's throat.

In her frock of silver tulle, with its overdress of lilac chiffon embroidered with deep rose-coloured carnations, her slender throat and hands gleaming with jewels, Madame la Marquise de Voex, her head held high, walked slowly down the wide marble steps with their crimson carpeting to her husband's room.

He rose as she entered, and his quiet, slightly amused glance swept over her with approval. The thought flashed through his mind that possibly his intended plan of action might seriously distress her; but forty years of complete freedom coupled with the means to gratify any smallest taste or whim, do not tend to inspire the spirit of self-sacrifice. He was intensely weary of immaturity; he possessed no children, and he wished to lead his own life, and to accomplish that laudible achievement far from the environment of Paris. Eve was rich, and his *belle-mère* had given him a definite distaste for a family life which necessitated the explanation of every action, not only to his wife, but, apparently, also to her.

He bent over Eve's hand ceremoniously.

"To what am I indebted for this unexpected pleasure?" he queried lightly.

"I merely felt that I should like to experience the satisfaction of making you my *amie*," Eve answered in her cool, languid voice.

She withdrew her hand.

"And do you travel alone?" she asked indifferently.

Monsieur de Voex put up his glass. His wife's serenity, indifference, and air of self-possession piqued him. He had never recognised these traits in her before; had he done so he might have deferred his visit to Algiers. And why this last question? It was surely not possible that Eve had heard.

"I am taking a certain amount of necessities with me, including my valet," he answered suavely.

"Then I will leave you to collect your belongings," Madame la Marquise said. She walked towards the door; as he opened it she turned, her head still held high. "Bon soir, monsieur," she said, "et bon voyage."

Then she closed the door, but as she walked upstairs and again back to her lonely room the tears fell one by one upon the marvellous rose-coloured carnations; they fell upon a newly-made grave that held within its depths the divine, tremulous dreams of youth and a dead happiness.

Madame la Marquise drove twice down the Bois, then she pulled the check string opposite the babies' playground, and, getting out, took one of the little green wooden chairs.

A small and exquisite person, with bunching curls and a clear little turned-up nose, was teaching a much be-ribboned poodle to "sit up." His jolly little gaitered legs were planted far apart, and his whole being was concentrated upon the enormous task before him. The poodle, tired of work, jumped up suddenly, barking vigorously, and his small master, taking too big a step, overbalanced.

Quickly Eve caught him as he fell. She held him closely to her. The baby, who was really rather an attractive person, smiled suddenly up at her as though to assure her he had escaped vital injury. As she looked down at the bobbing curls and the little legs stretched stiffly out, there dawned in her eyes that beautiful look of pathetic wistfulness and love—the look that comes into the eyes of a woman who has no children.

She got into her carriage, and it seemed to her as she drove away that the loneliness felt more unbearable than ever.

She closed her eyes and recalled again the sensation of the baby's curls pressed against her cheek.

There was a sudden shout, the horse plunged violently, then stood still trembling. The footman clambered quickly down and came round to the door.

"A man ran under the horses, Madame," he said nervously.

Eve stopped him with a gesture.

"Bring him in here," she said clearly, "and then drive to the nearest hospital."

Two gendarmes advanced carrying the man between them.

A sick terror, a wild hope, seized Eve; she stared again at the white unconscious face, the closed eyes of the injured man.

"It is my husband," she said suddenly in a shaking voice. "It is my husband. Drive home—quickly, quickly, and then go for a doctor," she ordered.

The little "great" world of Paris discussed the affair indefinitely.

"What would Eve do now?" was the universal question. So far Monsieur la Marquis had received no one. "An awakened conscience!" his friends averred caustically, as they turned away from the door.

"The price of veal should go up," Madame de Rameant remarked suggestively. "Your supposition entails an embrace and much jubilation," the Duchess Saint-Roche said gaily, "and, pour ma part, I trust that Eve will evince no desire for either one or the other. Severity, tempered with repartee, would be my role."

"I hear De Voex is still in a critical condition," her friend replied. "With your power of speech, my dear, you would probably be had up for manslaughter after one day's treatment."

"An equality of treatment is all I should desire," the Duchesse said with a decisive nod of her fine old head as her car moved on.

## III.

On the third night after his accident the sick man stirred and opened his eyes. They rested on the slender figure of a woman, lying in an attitude of utter weariness, asleep on a long couch beside his bed. He raised himself painfully on his elbow. Instantly the sleeping woman awoke.

"You must not move," she said very gently. "See, I will hold your head while you drink this."

She passed one hand behind his head, and with the other held the cup to his lips. His level grey eyes looked up at her.

"Where am I?" he asked feebly.

A lovely colour flooded her face.

"You are at home—with me," she answered in a low voice.

"At home—with you?" he repeated as he fell back upon his pillows.

After that one night Eve came no more to the sick-room.

The tumult of emotion that had flooded her being on the first night of the accident died slowly away. Before it all her pitiful barriers of pride and wounded love had gone down as flowers before a mighty wind.

As she watched, hour after hour, by the bedside, all the agony, the humiliation of that first parting swept over her again.

Again and again the question forced itself upon her. "When Robert was better, what would happen?"

Would he again return to Algiers, leaving her once more to the exposure of all eyes, that poor thing, a deserted woman, or would he—would he once more resume his position before the world as her husband?

She realised, with a thrill that seemed to pulse through her whole heart and soul, that that was what she wished. Impotently she clasped her slender hands. Where was her calm indifference, her serenity of mind? She had taught herself to believe that she no longer wished for love—that that sweet passionate tenderness she had once felt for her husband had been killed, had died that day they parted, and yet—and yet, surely, during this last week that happiness had stirred within its shroud?

After a fortnight the invalid was allowed to sit up for an hour.

He impatiently awaited the moment of his nurse's departure; he had resolved to find again the woman of his dreams, the woman whose eyes had looked at him so gently, whose hands had touched him with such tenderness. Again and again he had asked for her, only to be told the same invariable answer, "Madame la Marquise was out."

"Nous verrons," he said grimly, as he limped across his room to the door, "if at any moment during the day Madame la Marquise receives her guests."