

to forget her very life. He had been kind—that had perhaps hurt her more than all, that he could be kind; that he could come back to their home and go quietly into the routine of work; that he could take up the ordinary interests of life and pass this as an incident which was to her the sum of life. She had passed her days in numb, silent grief, sitting in the little nursery, listening to the spirit voice of her little one; her nights in fitful dreams, from which she would be awakened by the clutching of little tendrils fingers in her ears. He had thrown himself, body and soul, too, as it seemed, into work. She had seen him one day in court, when she had been obliged to wait for him, one moment, watchful, keen, but steady as the walls, and the next crushing, powerful, bearing down upon the commission at whom he was arguing, as though he would sweep from them every conviction that they had ever owned. She did not know that this was his man's way of carrying sorrow as great as hers, to throw himself at things. She saw only the fact that his mind seemed to be swept clean off everything but his work, and he came to be to her mind only a mighty engine, crashing through loads of work day and night, and stopping now and then to console her a little, or maybe to try to coax her into forgetfulness.

He had finally closed and locked the door of the nursery, telling her that she must not allow herself to be morbid. She knew that he was entirely right. It was the very course that she herself would have taken in another's case. He was truly sympathetic and tender to her, but that was just what she could not bear. He was sorry for her in her grief; she knew that he would cheerfully have made any sacrifice of self to lighten it if he could. But he did not share her sorrow; he did not seem to have part in it. She was glad, too, of this, for his sake; but always this knowledge served to set him apart from her. Where always till now their entity had been one, their emotions single, she saw a rift coming between them and widening, widening, till it placed them farther apart, it seemed, than when they had been strangers.

It was not that she was coming to care less for him, for she loved this tower of a man; the steel and blue light of his eyes was lodestar to her heart of hearts, and would be ever; but she had come to have to judge him and think of him, not by the maze and whirl of her maiden love in which he had been the man, but as a man bearing things and living in the ways of others of his sex. It was impossible that they could ever reach back to the relations of those early days, when there had been nothing in their world but their two blended selves. Content only, she argued, and such comfort and strength of love as comes to the gray paths of life could be theirs.

The three years that had passed since those days had only, day by day, served to widen the rift. The closed door of that little room seemed to place itself even more firmly between them, a barrier to perfect understanding. He had plunged more and more fully, almost viciously, it seemed, into his work as the years followed each other, while she had kept her numb grief near her heart until it had come to be near a passion with her to keep it alive. She did not want it to soften or die, for it seemed the only thing left to her. All things which she had thought meant life had been thrown to him in her love, and now that he did not seem to need that, but seemed to be so sufficient in his crushing work, her place seemed to be gone, her only niche in life to nurse the dying memory and to walk in unceasing rounds past a closed door. The feeling of being crowded out of his life by injunctions and traction cases, of being so utterly unnecessary to him, had grown into her very soul, till she was almost able to convince herself that he no longer wanted her, a useless appanage to his busy life. His unflinching, even gentleness, too, seemed an argument—a mask it must be, worn by the gentleman of pure honor, which she knew him to be, to hide his impatience with her. Surely he could not but be grieved at the failure she was constantly making of her life and his. Why would he not sometimes lift the mask and show the real feeling and make her suffer? It would be better than the dull wearing of his steady, accusing kindness.

Lately it had come to that point where she felt that she could not go on longer in this way. With no apparent chords of interest, with nothing but gentle tolerance revealed on his side, to greet him morning after morning and watch his too evident effort towards kindness, to sit evening after evening in silence, watching his head buried in precedents, till she would be forced to go to her own room and to

lie in the dark, next to the closed room, listening to the occasional rustling of a paper or to his pacing footsteps far into the morning; it could only be borne to the point of breaking. She knew that she was forcing herself, step by step, in her reasoning to an action which would break their home, and incidentally her heart, if there were any capability of more suffering in that heart. It did not seem to matter, though, for she could no more prevent her mind from moving in the circles in which it turned than she could prevent herself from thinking. This life, the living presence of its future, was unbearable to her; how much more so must it not be to him in the constant effort to soften and cover the truth. There seemed but one way—to end it by going quietly away. It was no mock heroics, none of the self-pity of a conscious martyr, only the acknowledgment of a failure and the wish to end an impossible situation. He neither felt nor understood the sorrow of her life, but had drawn into himself and away from her constantly. He had cared not at all, but had thrown it behind him as an unpleasant happening and had expected her to do the same, though he knew it was the fulness of her being. It were better to take from him the depressing presence of her life, with its spent energy.

All this she had tried to say to him to-night, tried to make him see that for him and for the better of his life she was willing to make a sacrifice of her home and of her position, and take upon herself that loneliest of all phases of life, the way of a separated wife. Maybe, she had thought, there might be some hope in speaking, maybe something of the boyish love of this man for her might come back to him, and it would yet be well. But no, for he had listened without a word and with no helping softness as she had stumbled on from position one to another, until it had come to seem, even to herself, that it was she alone who wished to be released from her life. Then he had accepted the situation with a quiet dignity, which put her own fevered, hurried words in the wrong at once. Not one accent of hurt or regret had he shown. If he had even shown pleasure or relief, it would have been something, for then she would have known that she was right. He had merely assured that she wanted to be free to live her own life, and had acquiesced without showing his own feeling, putting the weight of it upon her.

In any case, the definite step was taken, and, obviously, there was nothing to be done but to go on, with what plans she might, piecing together such fragments of life as seemed to be left. But plans would not come, for materials were lacking, and the soul of the builder was torn and swept in the rush and swirl of broken hopes and the cinders of burned dreams stuccoed, now and then through the night, by the rustling of papers or the tramp of a man in the room across the hall. He was working calmly after the incident! She might pass from his life, even as her baby had passed, and he would turn to his work.

The morning brought the same man and woman to face each other across the breakfast table; he urbane and kindly, but lined and a little pallid, as she thought, watching him—she wondered if he had not suffered a little.

There were the same commonplaces to be observed before the shrewd eyes of the servant, the same forced turn of observations and show of interest to be kept up, though one's heart might break unheeded while pouring the coffee. She realised this moment, looking at the strong, immobile face opposite, that never in their days had she so abjectly, so absolutely loved this man as she did this morning. Yet he would let her carry her treasure out of his life without a detaining look. And if she should go to him now and say that she would not go, he would make her welcome to stay in the same tone of action, indifference, heartlessness, what you would, that was driving her to wish to hate him, while the love of her whole heart welled up and beat around this tower of a man.

Now he was gone, with a simple good-bye on his lips, as on any other morning of these three years, down to his work in the city.

She was free now to think.

At first it seemed that she cared for nothing but to go away quietly with what money she had of her own—fortunately it would be plenty—and live for herself and with the memory of her little one for company. But her knowledge of herself told her that she could never live out a life of that kind. Work she must have, work that would be strong enough and would put demands upon her mind and strength and would take her out of herself.

Curiously enough, the old longings for a name and a position in the world of work, for fame in its measure, things long ago buried in her soul, were the last