

Decidedly he was still oblivious of this phase of the one whose beauty and fascination held him in content as they speeded through the lovely country—she, all life and strength and self-satisfaction at his right side, while at his left sat the child, now half-dozing, whom he had brought upon the trip without consulting Evelyn's pleasure.

As the three rode thus, Gerard gave orders to the chauffeur to slow down a little as they arrived at a certain point in the road whence the view was particularly attractive. Wide fields swept to far blue hills hung with the first hazes of the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Peace and abundance brooded everywhere, that hush of remoteness from the tangled affairs of men. Never had such affairs wandered here, thought Gerard. Yet just as he reflected, in the distance at the turn of the road, among the green trees, stood out the white walls and low towers of some human habitation.

'What do you suppose that is?' he asked.

'It's the Immaculate Convent,' answered Evelyn. 'And by the way, I have been wondering if it wouldn't be just as well for you to put Lily there in September.'

Gerard Staunton sat up with a suddenness that roused the sleeping child.

'I could not think of it!' he exclaimed.

'It would be a good place,' continued Evelyn, in tones whose musical qualities, disguised their inflexibility only to those who did not know her well.

'I thought I had told you I would never part with her,' demurred Gerard. 'I think the arrangement we made the night of our engagement will be perfectly satisfactory. She is so little trouble, and her old nurse, Madge, is so capable and so devoted to her!'

Evelyn Craig bit her full red lips, and kept silence a moment, finally saying:

'My dear, I don't think it would be practicable. We shall be going out a great deal, you know. You will not have much time for her—and I know nothing of taking care of children—'

'I must arrange time for her, whatever else we plan,' answered Gerard. 'I can't see how my duty to her can conflict with my duty to you.'

'Oh, if it's a case of duty!' objected Evelyn, with a note of childish petulance Gerard had not hitherto heard from her. He reached for her hand, saying:

'You know I love you past words.'

'I don't believe you really love anything but Lily,' she protested. And subtly, then, but surely, Evelyn's voice ran up the gamut of jealousy and selfish affection that are at once a flattery and an appeal to a man's fondness, to which other men strong as Gerard Staunton have succumbed. By the time they had driven a few miles further and had turned back, Evelyn had practically convinced Gerard that Lily would be better cared for in the convent, that the country air would do her good. This last stroke told on the man, who began to suspect he had been unreasonable in expecting a live-loving woman to mother his little child till she had learned how appealing and lovable the little one really was. By the time they arrived at the turn of the road leading to the convent he was ready to say yes when Evelyn insisted: 'You might try it for the next four months, anyhow—till after we return from our wedding tour.'

When Gerard presented himself and Lily at the convent the grave-eyed Superior was apparently none too anxious at first to take the little one. Exquisite and helpless, the child went to her straightway, and nestled against her knee. Mother Catherine was won over. Then in Gerard's own appeal there had been a kind of desperation, which she could not waive aside. She had asked if his wife were living, and as he answered negatively the expression on his face told her more than he expressed. Besides, as the automobile had approached she had had a glimpse of the handsome, veiled figure in the car, and now she divined its significance in Gerard's life. With that sixth sense of highly spiritualised natures she divined, too, that the luxurious-looking woman down there at the gate would not be so benign an influence in the child's life as the pure, sweet nuns; so all the motherhood of her true woman's nature asserted itself.

The tenderness, the spiritual note of her presence lingered with Staunton as he walked down to the car. Under its spell and the gratitude he felt, knowing that his little one was to be cherished, he paused halfway down the path, and looked about the beautiful grounds—the peace of the place with its smooth lawns, its old trees, its little vine-clad church, all taking his spirit so captive that he stepped in silence to his seat beside Evelyn.

If the few weeks previous to this day had been a change from Gerard's immediately preceding existence, the months that followed were to him a still further alteration from the mood and mode of living into which he had settled before Evelyn came into his life. With Lily at the convent, Evelyn now practically possessed him. He was at her constant beck and call, and that beck and call led him nightly and much in the afternoons through that mad pursuit for which a large city offers such opportunity—the unmitigated quest of pleasure. They sought it now, these two, along all its golden ways, till often Staunton went home jaded with the ceaseless pursuit of laughter, conviviality, and all the glittering superficiality of the career whither Evelyn had lured him. Recently on some such

frivolous nights, when he returned home, he sat long in the lonely, quiet house, asking himself what, after all, was the use of it. He had, of late, formed a habit of sitting in little Lily's room. The first month or so of the child's absence he had not missed her so keenly as he fancied he would. Evelyn absorbed his time. He was infatuated with her, and as a matter of fact was at home so little, that the absence of the vacant-minded child was not sharply felt.

But these last two weeks, when a sudden business call had taken him from the city, and so allowed him to recover his balance, he had begun to be somewhat disillusioned with the pace he had been keeping up; he began to crave his child's almost dumb companionship. His heart went out to her with all the tenderness with which he had brooded over her in the early years after her mother's death. With regret sharp as remorse he now remembered that of late he had been negligent. Writing to her signified practically nothing. He had promised himself to take frequent flying trips to see her, but the autumn had gone without his doing so. A few times he had suggested motoring Evelyn to the convent—but she had promptly turned him from the idea.

With the blindness of one more faithful than far-seeing, it was only lately that Gerard Staunton had become at all aware of the selfishness, the utter superficiality of the nature that informed Evelyn Craig's beautiful face and figure. Only lately had he begun to escape from the toils of abject infatuation in which these had snared him. Only lately had he begun to see her nature in clear perspective. And now that he had begun thus to see it, he began also to feel a loathing, not only for her, but for himself—that he had lent himself to the reckless, silly life of gratification he had shared with this woman for several months. How could he have done it, he asked himself! And now he was engaged to be married to her! What would be the life stretching out before them both? What but a continuation of this mad whirl, ending perhaps, a few years later, in a jaded, bored existence?

And where in that existence would there be place for the tenderness to his little child he had hoped to waken in Evelyn? In Evelyn Craig who, he now remembered with bitterness, had lured him away from his own duty? Having paid her bill at the convent he had practically turned her over to the nuns. That reminded him—there were probably letters from them now awaiting him in his room.

Letting himself into the quiet house, he made his way to his apartments. On his table there were two or three letters, and among the letters a telegram. It was, of course, opened first. It ran: 'Do come immediately. The child cannot get well.'

A chill shook his strong frame as he re-read the words, looking at the date of two days before. He gathered up the letters, and went alone to the garage, took out the roadster, and started at 2 o'clock in the morning for the convent, which he could easily reach by 6 o'clock.

Once it was light enough to permit of doing so, he took the letters from his pocket, and read them. Among them was a small, pale-grey envelope, one of many embossed 'E.C.' that had often come to him. He put it and all others into his pocket save those bearing the postmark of the little convent station. There were three of these in Mother Catherine's handwriting. The first stated that Lily seemed getting frailer, that he had better come to see her. The second one was in the same strain, saying that Mother Catherine and the other Sisters did not wish to have the entire responsibility for the sick child, that the convent was primarily a school, not an infirmary. The third letter most positively insisted on his immediate appearance. Then finally this telegram!

The four hours Gerard Staunton travelled alone through the night to his dying child were hours of deep feeling and spiritual illumination. Remorse for his neglect overwhelmed him. The whole life of the last few months of her absence weighed upon him now, sordidly, repulsively. In contrast to all its glamor *en passant*, it now became in retrospect a period of wretched, vain indulgence. The old gray days when, every evening, he returned fondly from his office to his child, seemed the best of his life. And of his own accord he had forfeited them; he had waived the opportunity he had once so loved, to waken intelligence in that sweet face! He could scarcely wait to clasp her in his arms again, to carry her back, to foster the frail strength, to begin once more the old life of devotion. For in those hours of coming to his senses, he knew that such was to be his service hereafter, that everything which could not fit in with such devotion must be sacrificed.

He had ridden far and thought and resolved much before he recalled the small gray envelope in his pocket which several months ago would have given him such a thrill. Carelessly now he opened it and impatiently tore it to bits as he finished reading, the contents ringing as insincere and disagreeable to him as was the faint scent of the familiar sachet that clung to envelope and note.

The pearl-gray mists held the white walls of the convent, the towers and façade of the little church, as Gerard approached them. The Angelus was ringing and a file of nuns was filing to Mass as he mounted the convent steps with quickly beating heart. He could scarcely wait for the Mother to be summoned. He was pacing the floor as she came in.