

sleeps, also a long one, it takes her until past midnight, and is a carefully and minutely worded repetition of the story Rene has told her under the trees. There is more than the story—an earnest protestation of her belief in its truth, and her perfect willingness to resign the fortune, to which she has never had a shadow of right.

‘I do not fear poverty,’ she writes, ‘trust me Vane! I was never born to be a lady of rank and riches—both have been a burden to me, a burden I will lay down, oh! so gladly. This “burden of an honour unto which I was not born” has weighed upon me like an evil incubus from the first. Oh, my husband, let us give back to George Valentine his birthright. He will act generously—more than generously I know, for I know him and for me I will go with you, and be in the day of disaster more faithful, more fond, more truly your wife, than I can ever be weighed down with wealth to which neither of us has a claim.’

But while she writes—her whole heart in her pleading words, she knows she writes in vain. More of her woman’s heart is in this letter than she has ever shown to the man she has married before. Apart from the misery of dwelling under the same roof as Camilla Routh—with the right done nobly for the right’s sake, far away from this place in which she has been so wretched, poor and obscure if it must be, she feels that a sort of happiness is possible to her yet. If her husband is capable of an action at once honest and noble, then her heart will go out to him—freely, fully. The very thought of his doing it, seems to bring him nearer her already. If he will but do the right—if he will but let her, she may care for him yet.

Next morning, by the earliest mail, two very lengthy, very disturbing epistles, in feminine chirography, go down to Sir Vane Valentine, Bart., among the mines of Flintbarrow.

CHAPTER VII.

‘IT WAS THE HOUR WHEN WOODS ARE COLD.’

There comes times in most lives whena after long depression and wearing worries, a sort of revulsion, a sort of exaltation of feeling sets in. Such a time comes now to Dolores. There is a revulsion in favour of her absent husband. Perhaps the fact that he is absent has something to do with it. Looking in his gloomy face it would seem a difficult thing for any woman, wife or otherwise to get up much sentiment for Vane Valentine. Her ideas, after all, of the sacrifice demanded are vague. If Manor Valen-

tine and the fortune are resigned to their lawful owner, she knows very little what will remain to them. She doubts greatly if the sacrifice will be made; it will never be; at least, until proof ‘clear as Holy Writ’ is placed before him—that is to be expected. He will be enraged and unbelieving beyond doubt. Still, once convinced—and she is sure such conviction must be possible since M. Paul is the claimant—he cannot be so glaringly dishonest and dishonourable as to retain what will no longer be his. Dolores, reasoning on these points is primitive and of another world than this; the distinction between mine and thine stands out with almost startling vividness in her unwordly mind. To retain, knowingly, the goods of another is to resign hope of salvation here and hereafter—that is her creed, sharp and clear. It is quite in her to regard with horror and aversion such a one. For a husband capable of such a crime she feels that even the outward semblance of regard and duty must come to an end—that for him, for all time, nothing but contempt could live in her heart. And to drag out life by the side of a man one despises—well, life holds for any woman few harder things.

But if he does the right—oh! then how gladly will she go with him, to poverty if need be; how she will honour him, how hardly she will try to win him back. She does not fear poverty—was she not poor on Isle Perdrix, and were not those the best, the very best, days of her short life? She would like a cottage, she thinks, where she might reign alone, far from stern Miss Dorothy, sneering Miss Routh, and with her husband alone, who knows? she might learn to love him; he even might learn a little to care for her. She would so strive, so try, so pray! Anything—anything would be better than this death in life here, this most miserable estrangement, this loveless house, these cold, hard faces. Any change, be it what it may, must be for the better. She will try—at least—the opportunity being given—she will do her utmost to soften and win the man who is her husband.

With hopes like these in her girl’s mind, Dolores waits through the long day that follows. She does not go out; she has a feeling that she would rather not meet Rene again until she had seen her husband. She must be loyal of heart, even to the shadow of a shadow, and to sit by Rene’s side, look up in Rene’s eyes, listen to Rene’s voice, and remain thoroughly true to Vane Valentine is no such easy task. If she goes abroad she may meet him, so she remains at home.

The evening post brings her a letter from London from Jemima Ann. She has half