

It seemed to her so presumptuous, considering the vastness of creation, to attach so much importance to the existences of the little creatures who "came and went" on this one little insignificant planet.

But then again, the question arises, what of man's mind? What of this strange inexplicable power he possesses to dive into the heart of things and find out so much? What of this undeniably inrooted expectation of a larger and fuller life to come? After all, could man possibly be so insignificant, since he possessed such wonderful powers and capabilities? Did not this strange mysterious soul of his, actually and indeed, place him first, amidst all this majesty and grandeur? Was she, in spite of her seeming littleness, in reality one of the most wonderful of God's creations? If so, why was she also so weak and helpless and seemingly useless?

She drew her hand wearily across her eyes. She would feign have given it up, but the wondering and the questioning still plied her, and her mind rambled on.

This will of hers; was it part of her soul or a separate wonder? If a part, why did not the two work more in unison? Why was her soul always, always longing and yearning for something which she could not express? Why, when she gazed away over the hills, and upward into space, did that great craving possess her, which made the earth and everyday life seem so common-place and unsatisfying? Why could not she force her soul to rest, by the might of her will, for with all her heart she longed to do so; longed to still her fevered imaginings and questionings and live through the day in peace.

But she could not.

Day after day in her solitary rambles, the girl's heart swelled with the passion "to know," and day after day the monotony and seeming littleness of her life grew ever more oppressive.

Even in the night she could not rest, and many were the hours she spent at her window, gazing earnestly up at those silent worlds, wondering about it all. Wondering sometimes what was her particular mission in life, for, since everything in creation appeared to have a definite work of some kind, surely she too must have been created for some special purpose.

And yet, as far as she could see, she was absolutely useless. And the thought hurt her grievously, for away among those lonely Cumberland hills, this solitary girl was panting to be doing. Anything so that it made her life a reality, and took from it the aimlessness and torpor that were so galling to her fearless, energetic spirit. She had read books in search of knowledge and enlightenment, and what had she gained? How had they helped her? Alas! had they not rather harmed her, for in her bitterness she had chosen books congenial to her feelings and fed on literature that only heightened her cynicism and plunged her deeper into scepticism.

But amidst all this chaos of mind, there was one feature in the girl's heart

that never changed, and which maybe saved her from growing up a misanthropic atheist. It was the deep, passionate love which burned in her strong young heart for those dear to her.

True that wealth of love was lavished almost solely upon three, but her loyalty and love for those three was very truth itself. One she had already lost, the beautiful young mother, whom she remembered so tenderly and longed for without ceasing.

The others were Jack and little Helen Liston, the schoolmistress's invalid child.

These three stood alone in her heart, the rest of the world she regarded chiefly as a large collection of human beings and "nothing more."

Meanwhile the time passed, and at length Madge discovered she was getting hopelessly bewildered and that her head ached. Finally she came to the wise conclusion that she had thought quite enough for one day, and so she raised herself on her elbow and turned to Jack.

How bright and happy he looked, seated there, leaning back lazily against a tree; it seemed to Madge quite refreshing to see him, and for a little time she watched him in silence.

Suddenly he turned to her, and their eyes met.

"So you've come back, have you?" he asked laughingly. "It was awfully mean not to offer to take a fellow with you."

"I wasn't aware that I'd been away; you must be dreaming."

"I dreaming indeed; well, I like that! It's you that's been dreaming, you've been to the Land of Nod, and to *dolce far niente* to see Alice in Wonderland."

Madge laughed. "I'm sure I haven't been to sleep," she replied. "You settled yourself as if you didn't mean to be disturbed for about a month, and so I had a long think to pass the time."

"Well, don't tell me what you thought about and I'll say no more. My brain-power isn't at its best just now, and I daren't risk any extra strain. Food is more in my line than anything at present; let's have lunch."

"What? have lunch before you've caught a single fish?"

"A single fish indeed! what do you call that?" and he tossed a good-sized minnow to her feet.

Madge laughed merrily. "I'll call it a small whale if you like," she said. "It would be a pity to call it a minnow, as it took nearly two hours to catch."

Jack laughed too and threw down his rod.

"We'll leave them in peace for a while," he said. "It's too bad to catch them quickly, they haven't time to say good-bye to each other. What is there for lunch. I'm ravenously hungry."

"Then you'd better eat your fish first," remarked his sister slyly, "for there's only sandwiches."

"Thanks! but I thought perhaps you'd like to take it home to the mater."

"I would, only she might want me to take it to someone in her district," and so saying, Madge tossed the little thing

back into the water and proceeded to unpack their luncheon. When they had finished Jack settled himself for a chat, lying with his head in Madge's lap. He had decided that that particular spot was not good for fishing and that further efforts would only be waste of time.

For fully two hours they stayed thus, enjoying thoroughly the June sunshine and perfect idleness and a long talk without fear of interruption.

Jack was the chief spokesman this time, Madge merely asking questions. She loved to hear of all that he had been doing and with such an interested listener he could not choose but speak.

Both were sorry when at last they had to start homeward, Madge especially, for she grudged anyone a word with Jack during his short visit.

"Well, if I enjoy the rest of my stay as much as I have done to-day," he said, as they drew near the manor, "I shall not want to go away again."

"Well, don't go, Jack," and Madge looked pleadingly into his face. "I'm sure your friends won't mind much if you give up the yachting."

"Yes, but they would. I've promised such a long time to make up the party. I'm going to superintend the cooking, don't you pity them? Fawcett's too good a fellow to disappoint, and it's all his arranging. I'm going shooting in Scotland with him when we get back."

"Why is he such a good fellow?" asked Madge, for she was inclined to be jealous, Jack had spoken of this friend so often.

"Because he is, I suppose," replied Jack, smiling at her clouded face. "I hope to bring him here next year and then you'll see for yourself. I wanted him to come now, but he couldn't."

"And I sincerely hope he won't be able to next year either," was the unexpected reply.

"Why on earth not?" asked Jack in surprise. "We'll have no end of fun together."

"You two will, I've no doubt," she replied bitterly, "but two's company, three's none, and I don't want him. It's too bad of you, Jack," she continued hotly, "you only come home once a year, and now you talk of bringing a friend. I shall see scarcely anything of you if you do. Besides, you can see him nearly every day in London, surely that's enough without taking him about with you."

"My dear girl, you are talking nonsense. As if I should be likely to bring him if he'd be in the way. He'll be just like one of ourselves, and you'll like him immensely. I thought it would be a pleasure to you; he's no end of a joke and a real good fellow all round."

"I shall hate the very sight of him," replied Madge obstinately. "I don't care if he's the nicest man in the world; I don't want him here and I hope you won't bring him."

Then, seeing a vexed expression on Jack's face, she quickly changed the subject, and in a few minutes they reached home.

(To be continued.)