

The Price

(Continued from page 61)

not make them understand that kind of service."

What had been confined to suggestion, glances, gossip, now became more unmistakable. She saw it on the street, in the houses of their friends, at the war philanthropic meetings they attended. People were as cordial, even more cordial, than before to her, but held aloof from Hugh. Sometimes hints were dropped, so plainly that it seemed impossible that he should not notice them. There were avoidances so direct as to be almost "cuts." She resented fiercely the sympathetic attention given to her.

One night at dinner she heard him express repugnance to modern warfare, its grim horror, its ruthlessness, in a way that raised new doubt within her. When she was alone she faced the question in all its naked evil. Was it indifference, the lack of sensibility, the clouding of clear patriotic duty by the absorbing interest in business—his contracts, their money? Or was he fearful? Might there not be in him a fear, an aversion, such as she had, against which he was as helpless as she?

She chose to believe that he did not see, did not understand. It seemed too utter a degradation to believe that it could be fear, cowardice.

"Peggy," he said to her the next day. "Would you mind very much if I had to cut my holiday short?"

"If you mean should I miss you tremendously, Hugh—yes, I should," she answered, her heart dancing with delight. "If you wonder whether I should seek to keep you when you feel you ought to go, the answer is No, many times over."

And she saw in his face at that moment something she had never seen there before. His eyes did not meet hers as they had been accustomed to. She understood that he knew what people were saying of him. It was not insensibility that had made him walk through the semi-hostile world of his own people as one unconscious of opinion, but—something else, what, she did not know, or would not.

"I am thinking of going over to Spain," he said. "There is, I am advised, a great potential market there. I should like to look over the ground while I am on this side of the Atlantic."

"You think of going soon, Hugh?" she asked.

"In three days," he replied. "But I will not go if you would rather I stayed here."

"No, it is not that. I would not like to hinder you, but I am glad to know that we shall have a few days more." She smiled, laying a hand on his arm.

AND that night she fought her fight in the darkness of her room, love warring with fear. The price of all salvation is the cross. There is no other way. Only by laying down life may one take it again in its full eternal splendour. It is measure for measure, mine for thine. The cup may not pass. Down to the bitterest dregs must it be drunk. The sorrow of the days of the Passion, the blackness of the Crucifixion hours, make the white glory of the Easter morning. The resolve was made though fear, bitter as death, stood in the way. He must go. He should go. No cloud must rest on him. Day was breaking when, at last, she slept.

It was late when she rose. Hugh was not coming until the afternoon. The struggle had wearied her, but she could not rest.

"You are overdoing this holiday making," said her mother, anxiously scanning the pale, tired face. "Hugh does not understand how ill you have been. You look worse than before he came."

"I slept badly," Peggy replied. "A wakeful night always makes me an object for pity."

The excuse did not satisfy Mrs. Langham. She cherished a little resentment against Hugh Dunstan. She knew her daughter's mind better than did her husband. It was the gossip that was breaking her. Hugh had no right to put her in so difficult a position. Mrs. Langham was a simple woman. Business she did not know a great deal about, but she understood that patriotism should transcend all other obligations and ambitions. The stinging tongues were destroying the girl's happiness; into her eyes the old haunting fear had returned. If Hugh could not see his duty as others saw it, the least he could do, would be to go away and spare the girl.

"Has not Hugh made up his mind yet?" she asked.

"He will do what is right, Mother," Peggy answered.

"Because what Hugh does must be right?" her mother said.

"No—because it is right," Peggy replied. "Those who have judged him lightly will see how ridiculous they have been."

"Well, I don't understand these new

kinds of excuses," said Mrs. Langham. "One either stands by his country or he does not, and all the plausible excuse-making and reason-spinning will not alter it. A man either shoulders the rifle or he doesn't, and despite all you say, Peggy, this is what is troubling you."

Peggy smiled and put her arm around her mother.

"We shall make you mince up your words into little tiny bits and swallow them one by one," she said. "Some men blow trumpets on street corners when they propose to do anything they think noteworthy, others take duty as a matter of course and just do it; that is Hugh's way."

"I can't see what makes you unhappy then, Peggy," her mother said.

"One may make the sacrifice and not be able to smile over it," Peggy answered.

THEY watched the Highlanders drilling. Smartly set-up lads to whom, three years before, soldiering had been the last thought in their minds. From university and divinity school, law and business office, shop and factory, busy street and Highland glen, they had come. Peggy liked their trim, clean-cut appearance, their ruddy faces, Scots' accent. There was the clear grit of the fighting breed in their every movement. Presently, under Allenby, they were going to fight their way on the last Crusade, up through Palestine to drive the Turk out of Jerusalem. The world's great business was war—war or slavery—war now or interminable war hereafter.

Hugh was more silent than usual. They soon returned to the house. Mr. and Mrs. Langham were out. The shaded room, giving upon the portico, was cool and pleasant. There was a pink spot on each of Peggy's cheeks, an eager light in her eyes. She leaned forward in her chair, facing him, twisting his ring on her finger.

"Hugh," she said. "Would it be of much consequence if you abandoned the Spanish visit?"

"Why, no, Peggy," he replied. "It occurred to me that it might be to my advantage to go there. A neutral country, that will come into line with the modern business world when the war is done, presents good prospects. I can easily abandon the project."

"You will think me very exacting, very changeable," she continued, "but I want to go away from here, to England, and then home. I cannot explain myself, so inexplicable a bundle of whimsies I am."

"There is no need to explain," he said. "It is the thing above all others that we have desired. You have spoken to your father and mother about it?"

"No, I wished to speak to you first," she said. "They will be delighted. I should like the arrangements made quickly. If it were possible I would go to-morrow, yes, to-day, and have it over. No, I have quite decided, I shall not change my mind," she answered the look in his face. There was a steamer leaving the next day. Preparations were quickly made. Many friends came to wish them farewell. As the ship was leaving, a friend of the Langhams who had accompanied them aboard, shook hands with Hugh.

"Congratulations!" he said. Dunstan puzzled long over the word and the way in which it was spoken.

They were not spared the horrors that have crimsoned the Mediterranean waters. The wreckage of ships, shell-shattered boats. Once they took from a tossing boat the few survivors of a murdered ship, half-crazed women with dead babies on their breasts, living children taken from the clasp of dead mothers. In the Bay of Biscay, they had, under strict orders, to pass a crowded boat, tossing in the great rollers, its frenzied occupants shrieking agonized appeal. The Hun follows such escaping boats in the hope of taking further toll from the pity of passing ships.

And night and day Peggy Langham lived with unconquerable fear more bitter than death. Pale, yet with the sign of love's sacrificial triumph in her eyes, she moved about the ship with Hugh, neither day or night would she remain below. He watched over her as she slept through the night in the deck chair, the darkened ship plunging through the ghostly sea, her hand in his. There were long hours of meditation, setting facts in orderly array, and there came to him knowledge and light. He understood the vastness of the sacrifice.

He left her at the London Hotel with her parents and for some hours was away.

"There is a ship leaving for home at the week-end," he said on his return. "I spoke to your father and mother, they suggested I should see you."

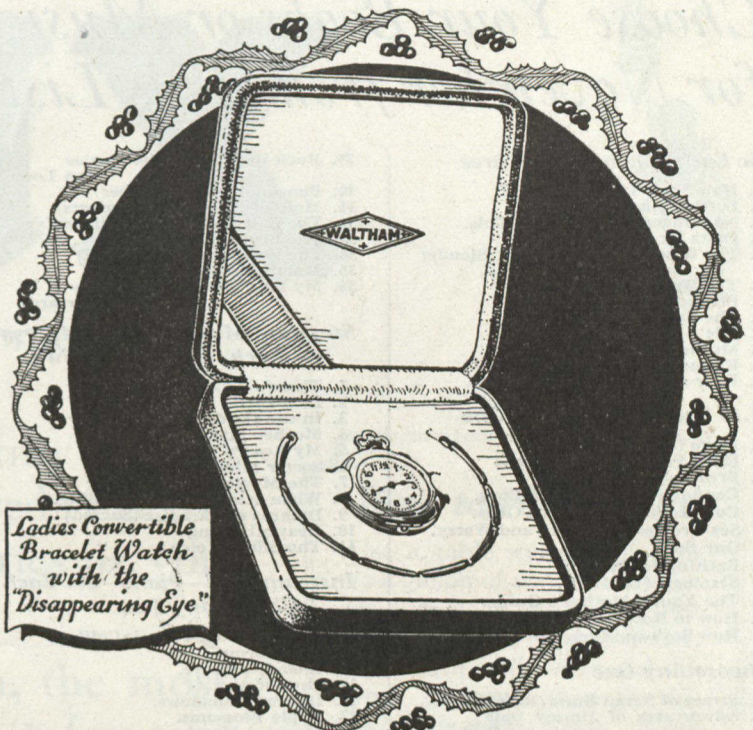
"Yes, let us go," she said.

"You can bear it, Peggy?" he asked.

"Yes, I think the fear has gone," she smiled.

"And, Peggy, I called at the Embassy and wired across that I was on my way home to enlist," he said.

"Yes, I knew you would," she answered.



Ladies Convertible Bracelet Watch with the "Disappearing Eye"

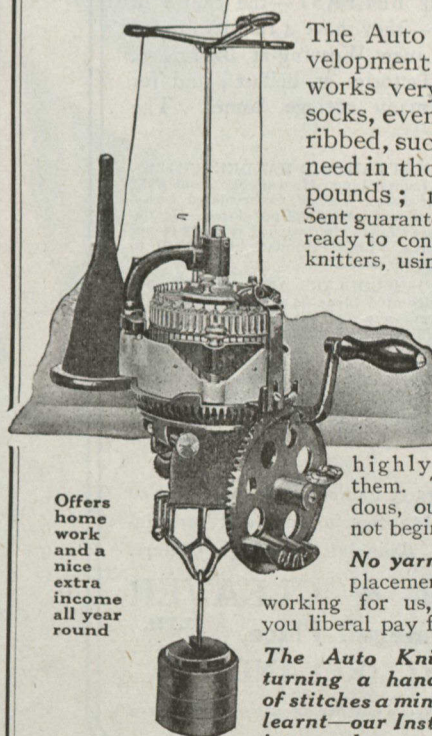
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