



## LAST LEAVE

A Mother's Thoughts That She Never Utters

By MILLICENT PAYNE

Illustrated by MARCEL OLIS

God! My boy that was born of me!  
Fed at my breast, nursed at my knee;  
Strong in body and brave in mind—  
Oh, that this son of mine were blind,  
Or maimed, that he might not know  
that war

Where the screaming shells and the  
death-guns are!

God! My boy that was born of me!  
Why must this ghastly world-death be?

God! Is it part of Your mighty plan  
That man should slaughter his brother-  
man?

Do you need to take him, my only one,  
Now, when his life has just begun,  
When the young strength beats in his  
waking heart

Untried, all eager to take its part  
With the good and noble, the great  
and true—

Is this Your work for my boy to do?

He was Your gift to me years ago,  
Big son of mine that I cherish so.  
See, I have had him for twenty years;  
Shame that I cling to him now with  
tears—

Myself a coward and he so strong,  
Light in his eyes, on his lips a song.  
Bear with me yet for a little while;  
Tears are easy, 'tis hard to smile.

*God, give me strength to be brave and  
true!*

*Help me to give him back to You!*



## MEN WOULD DO THE SAME TO-DAY

By PATIENCE REED

I WAS in the hammock under the pines, with his letter still in my hand, late on the afternoon of that June day. At first I could only read and reread it in a sort of still ecstasy, but now, that I had it two full hours, I wanted to sing and laugh and shout the news to the whole world. Instead, I swung the hammock and waved the letter wildly at a scolding squirrel on a branch of pine high above me.

Across the little corn-field, Miss Phoebe Taylor, pumping water for her garden, saw the fluttering paper and waved back to me. I decided then and there to tell her the glad, glad news. She had known, of course, that something had been amiss between Jim and me, but I had been too hurt and sad to tell any one. Now, they were over, those awful two years of silence and separation, and he was coming home in August, coming home to me.

Kip, the tawny Collie, came barking up the lane with the cows from the pasture, and after getting them safely into the farmyard, trotted over and pressed a great head in my lap—with brown eyes mutely questioning.

"Let's go and tell Miss Taylor, Kip," I begged, and Kip wagged consent and understanding sympathy.

All Canadian Junes are wonderful, but that June of 1914 stands out unforgetably to many of us. As we passed down the garden path, Kip brushed against the rose bushes and the white and red petals fluttered to the ground. An oriole on the highest tip of the great poplar at the gate showered down a little rose-leaf symphony. The maples along the road were greener, the foliage thicker, the sky a deeper blue—oh! the world was good and kind that wonderful June day of 1914!

And so we came to where Miss Taylor was waiting for me at the little white picket gate. Miss Taylor lived with her brother, a retired sea captain. He treated her much in the same way as he had treated his first mate in those halcyon days when he had "sailed the high seas." His attitude was one of superiority, with a little respect thrown in. A captain was a captain, and a first mate was merely a first mate, albeit better than a cabin boy, or a deck hand. Miss Phoebe thought there was no one in the whole wide world like brother Jim.

A little, faded old woman, with hair that might have been the colour of my own once, but now it was faded out, not simply white. Her eyes were faded, too, a colourless blue, like a blue garment that has been washed many, many times. She had a little way of sitting quietly and looking beyond you intently, as though seeing something else. Then, when you spoke, she would come back, gently, with a little ashamed smile. This year, I heard one of our greatest Canadian lecturers and authors say that women spent most of their lives waiting; and there flashed before me the picture of Miss Phoebe as she stood that night at the little gate. She carried with her—poor, faded, heart-broken—that atmosphere of waiting, though I never realized it until I had heard her story. And yet she was not colourless, nor uninteresting, only a very dear old lady to whom you wanted to go with your sorrows and joys.

"Oh, Miss Phoebe! Such news! Such news!" I cried. "He's coming back! Jim's coming back!" I had seldom kissed her, but in my joy I drew her close. "Oh, Miss Phoebe, I had to tell you! See! Here's his letter! Jim's coming in August, coming to me! I know I'll die of sheer happiness!"

She patted me and crooned over me. "My dear! My dear little girl! How sweet, how perfectly sweet, for you both!" and with little excited murmurings and ejaculations she led me to the verandah where there were chairs.

And there, in the early dusk of the June night, I told her everything; our quarrel, and now the blessed reconciliation.

"If he has suffered what I have," I ended, "may God forgive me for my pride and wickedness. Never one day—one moment—in these two endless years but the thought of him has been with me. I willed to forget, but I couldn't. To think of living my life without him! I couldn't do it. I simply—could—not have done it, Miss Phoebe."

"THANK God that you didn't have to, dear child," and Miss Phoebe looked wistfully with unseeing eyes into the dew-drenched garden. Great joy is not always selfish. It sometimes opens our eyes to the sorrows hidden in other lives. It gave me sudden vision and understanding. There had been whispers of a long-dead romance, and this was the hour for confidences.

"Oh, Miss Phoebe, you are sad,—you are remembering—won't you tell me about—him?" I pleaded. "It helps to tell."

In the half light her eyes were suddenly bright

with tears—eyes in which I had never seen tears before.

"Why, child," she began haltingly, "I haven't spoken, nor heard his name spoken, for years—for sixty years. Last year in a home paper I saw the name of his nephew—the same name—and my heart almost stopped. This after sixty years!" with a wan smile.

"So you see one can bear it for—for more than two years," she added gently.

Then she told me falteringly, brokenly, of the love of her early youth, of the ardent young lover who had been to her even what Jim was to me.

"It was in September, a September all red and gold, that he marched away with his regiment to fight for the cause of the weak in the Crimea. He came of fighting stock, you see, and he had to go," she ended softly.

"I don't see why," I argued, angry with a hot and sudden anger at the man, dust and ashes for so many long, long years, and with a great, deep pity for her whose life had been one gray, dull monotone. "Your happiness should have meant more to him than the lust to fight and kill."

She drew away from me, stiffly erect, pitifully roused.

"Why—it was for a principle, for honour, for the future. Don't you understand? He had to go. There was nothing else for him—ah! I fought it all out, years ago!" she added weakly.

I crept to her again.

"I think I understand," I comforted her. But I did not understand. I lied. Still that surging anger at the man who could march away so blithely leaving this woman to face the years alone with nothing but her memories.

"He was so brave, so fine, giving up all—his work, which he loved, and his future, and me," proudly. "If I can only—be worthy of him. He was so young and splendid, and I am old and—ah, me, child, I've so tried to keep young in heart for him, so that when we—" her voice trailed off into silence.

A little breeze drifted across, bringing with it the heavy scent of syringas from her garden—mock orange blossoms, we called them. Somewhere in the woods a whip-poor-will called plaintively, and nearer at hand one answered the call. In the fragrant twilight I pondered over the story with a sort of wonder.

HERE was a woman who could live sixty years with these two things to strengthen and sustain her: the memory of a great love, and the infinite trust that each year brought her surely nearer to a glad eternity of reunion. But to renounce the thought of the years together, of work and play, of home and children, of light and laughter!

"I don't want to make you sad on such a night," she told me suddenly.

"You are wonderful, Miss Phoebe," I burst out. "And thank God that wars are over," I said as I rose to go.

"Oh, men would be as brave to-day for an ideal or a principle," she assured me.

"They would see it differently now, I think," I answered.

But she only shook her head and smiled.

August came at last—and with it war. For war was not over, after all. That illusion fell with many others, and instead of Jim came his letter:

"My darling, I am going Overseas. I have had some training, and though the military life has never appealed to me, it's up to me—to every fellow who can—to go. I daren't think of what I'm leaving. My dearest, dearest girl—you must help me—you and God—"

"You must help me!" It burned itself into my soul—"and God"—his prayer. In a dazed agony I hurried in to Montreal to have a few moments with him as his train passed through to Quebec. And over and over, in time to the grinding wheels, "You must help me, you must help me—you and God!" And from somewhere strength or numbness, and no weeping, at that brief meeting and final parting. For it was the endless parting.

I stand now where that other woman stood, sixty years ago. I, too, have fought my fight—the old fight for readjustment. There is slowly coming back to me a rather pitiful grip on things. Life has not quite beaten me. With readjustment will come to me what came to Miss Phoebe. My greatest joy is the memory of his love, my sustaining hope that I may come home to him one day—my splendid, eager Jim—my greatest fear that my life may not be fine enough to make me worthy of sharing the same Heaven with him.

Miss Phoebe's prophecy was true, you see, "Men would do the same thing to-day for an ideal, a principle."