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photograph. That would stop them worrying you with questions, and as it has to be told some time, why not now?"

"No, no, it would never do," Fenella protested; "the less I let them know about Laurie, the better. I can assure you, Agnes, the kindest thing to Laurie is for me to obliterate myself at the present moment."

Fenella went out quickly, caught up a soft golf cap from a peg in the vestibule and, crossing the lawn, was lost in the shadow of the trees beyond.

#### CHAPTER V.

There are five factors that count in a man's life—hunger, thirst, ambition, love and duty.

A MILE and three quarters to the west of Spinney Chase, at the corner of a lane that, even in summer, was like a wet ploughed field, Mrs. Bainton's cottage looked across a wooded patch to the railway line—the only sign of human enterprise or nearness that the pine land waste vouchsafed to her.

She sat always—old Mrs. Bainton—in a chair drawn up close to the diamond-paned casement, and gazing out with eyes that were keen under their puckered brows, watched the smoke of the passing trains that represented life to her, stranded in the backwash of it here by the retreating tide of years.

When her husband, who was old and feeble, but could still fend for them both, passed away, she had sunk into a still retrospect, living over again the days that had been hers with him from her girlhood.

The advent of Lisbeth, whom she thought of only in an abstract way, as "my son George's handsome girl," made no ripple in the old woman's absorbed life. Liz came and went as she pleased. She was full of energy and the daily task of setting the cottage in order and attending on her grandmother had seemed a light occupation which left her free between whiles to wander in the woods and lanes. Mrs. Bainton asked no questions and evinced no interest in Liz's life outside the cottage walls. Thus it came to pass that when the girl was found dead at some little distance from her home, no information could be gained respecting her movements from Mrs. Bainton, and humanity dictated that the actual tragedy should be concealed from the old woman. She was told that Liz had been injured by an accident and could not return home. A neighbour undertook to carry out the dead girl's duties—and with that Mrs. Bainton appeared perfectly satisfied. She dismissed the subject with the remark, "Poor lass! I'm sorry that she's hurt herself—but I expect she'll soon be all right again. Her father, George, was a fine strong fellow and Liz takes after him."

The mental repose which often accompanies helplessness of body made Mrs. Bainton resigned and almost happy, to sit there, hour after hour, gazing out of the window and silently reviewing the events of a long life of activity. She was quite alone for the moment, Mrs. Case, the friendly neighbour, having gone briskly round the edge of the common, making the excuse that she must attend to the needs of her own household. In reality she was consumed with the desire to gain the latest information respecting the crime. Hence Mrs. Case's peregrinations took her much further afield, and unconsciously she found herself hurrying towards the canal path. Meanwhile Mrs. Bainton sat in solitary tranquility gazing across the waste land.

Suddenly the apathy on her wrinkled face changed to vivid interest. A man had come from the shade of the copse and now, with shambling, unsteady gait, approached the cottage. He pushed open the door with a blow of his hand and lurched into a seat by the table. The old woman regarded him attentively. He was young and obviously of gentle birth. Mrs. Bainton had been lady's-maid to a Marchioness in her youth, and she could discriminate between the upper and lower ranks of life. The man was a gentleman, she was sure, although his clothing, originally of good

quality, was ragged and weather-stained. He was without hat or collar. His shirt, of fine white linen, was soiled and torn open at the throat, showing the fair skin on his chest where the line of sunburn ended. He spoke no word but filled a cup with milk and drank it off at a gulp, then snatched at the loaf and ate ravenously.

"I'm thinking you're parched and hungry, sir," Mrs. Bainton said quietly, and he turned his head at the sound of her voice and stared at her, with fevered blue eyes from which the light of reason had departed. Mrs. Bainton recognized that she was in the presence of a man not in possession of his full faculties, but her impotency to protect herself rendered her immune from fear.

"Yes—I'm thirsty. I've had nothing to eat or drink for a long time—I don't know how long . . . ever since I've been trying to find my way on to parade." He rose, with the crust of bread still in his hand, muttering hoarsely, "I shall be late—must go on—and on—and on! If only I knew the way."

A good-looking face always appealed to Margaret Bainton's simple code of philosophy and now her sympathies went out towards the stranger who had come to her door in such sore plight.

"What's happened to you that you're all mud and rags? You look fair clemmed, poor lad."

The young fellow passed his hand across his forehead—and the keen dark eyes watching him saw, with a sensation of discomfort, that there was dried blood on the hand, and the shirt-cuff and sleeve of his coat were stiff and discoloured with the same dark stains.

"Maybe you've been fighting, young man?" the widow queried with a touch of severity.

He shook his head. "No—no—but can't you tell me the way? I ought to be on parade by this time."

"Parade? No, I know of no such place about here. You must be thinking of Aldershot, which is some distance away. If my girl, Liz, were at home, she might direct you."

A startled expression, as of recognition, crossed the man's face. "Liz—Liz—is she here? Yes, of course, it was Liz." He paused, then added with emphasis, "A good girl and a handsome one!"

"It's not likely that my Liz and the one you're talking of are the same, although what you say is true of my lass. I'm Mrs. Bainton. . . ."

"Yes, yes," he broke in with feverish impatience, "Liz Bainton—that's the name!—as handsome as she's good. Who could have wanted to hurt a girl like her!"

MRS. BAINTON was convinced by this time that his wits were wandering. "Of course no one would wish to hurt the lass; it was an accident."

"No accident but a cruel deed. She was struck down—murdered, I tell you," he thundered out with sudden fury, and the reflection that it is wise to humour a madman induced Mrs. Bainton to change the topic of conversation. "Your boots are precious dirty for my clean floor, young gentleman, and I'm thinking you'd best be going on your way. There's nothing here to keep you."

He went towards the open door, in obedience to her suggestion, walking as if in his sleep, then stood hesitating, with the brilliant mid-day sunlight striking full on his pallid, drawn face. "I wish I could remember . . ." he muttered, then looked over his shoulder with the final injunction, "If Fenella comes here, please tell her I had to go—duty first and before all things. You won't forget my message? Duty first and before all things."

"A good sentiment, sir," the old woman told him, then, like a shadow, he was gone from the doorway and she saw him flit across the rough corner of land and vanish under the trees.

Silence returned to the cottage—a silence almost as unbroken as that which enveloped the bare room near the canal, where Liz Bainton lay in the still majesty of death, the dark eyes closed with a fringe of black lashes resting on the marble cheeks,