

## "IF LOVING HEARTS WERE NEVER LONELY—";

OR,

MADGE HARCOURT'S DESOLATION.

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

CHAPTER XII.  
THE UNFORSEEN.

THE following day turned out very wet, but in spite of the rain and Madge's persuasions, Jack persisted in going to his golf match in the afternoon.

Guy stood with his hands in his pockets, leaning against the door-

post, when the trap came round, and watched Madge put Jack's mackintosh round him, saying as she did so, "I wish you wouldn't go, Jack. If you get cold you'll perhaps be laid up with pleurisy again."

"But I'm not going to take cold, sister mine," he replied gaily. "It isn't really raining, it's only drizzling. I shall keep this old cape on, and look at the thickness of my boots."

"But it looks so heavy all round, it will be worse later on. You'd better take father's overcoat as well."

Jack laughed good-naturedly, saying, "What about my goloshes and umbrella, etc. You'd better send them in the prism with nurse."

"Hope you'll enjoy yourself, Guy," he added. "You must gently remonstrate with Madge if she talks too learnedly, because I know your brain won't stand it. You know where the cigars are."

"I shall be all right," was the ready answer, and just then Madge hurried past him, out into the rain. A sudden desire to kiss Jack before he went had come over her, and she mounted on to the step, regardless of the rain and the pony's restiveness.

Jack kissed her fondly. "Good-bye, old lady," he said. "Look after Guy, won't you?"

"You'll take care of yourself," she urged, without replying to his question. "And come straight home when you've finished the game."

"I will if I can, but I may have to go in to dinner with Haines," and with a last wave he drove off.

Madge stood and watched him until he was out of sight, then walked slowly up the steps into the hall.

"You'll catch your death of cold," remarked Guy, looking down at her feet. "Haden't you better change your slippers, they must be wet through."

Madge looked down mechanically and answered, "I never take cold." Then she added uneasily, "But Jack does, he has a delicate chest."

"He's well wrapped up, I don't think

he'll hurt," said Guy reassuringly. "And he won't be out long. You needn't bother about me, I can read the paper."

"Oh! very well!" she replied, rather relieved, "I shall be in the drawing-room if you want anything," and she walked away at once.

Guy went into the smoke-room and threw himself into an easy chair, but it was with rather a disconsolate air than otherwise. He didn't at all appreciate her ready acquiescence to leave him alone, and had hoped she would ask him to sit with her. After an hour's solitude, he finally decided to go in search of her, and throwing away his cigar end, proceeded to the drawing-room.

He found her alone with an open book in her hands and some work beside her. When he appeared she laid down her book and took up the work, and Guy, remarking that he had grown tired of his own company and hoped she wouldn't mind if he stayed, took a low chair opposite to her.

"You read a tremendous lot, don't you?" he asked, as a preliminary.

"Not so much as I used to, I have grown tired of it."

"Have you taken to work instead?"

"No, I very rarely work, except to knit. I am fond of knitting, as I can think all the time."

"I can't imagine what you find to think about. I hardly ever think, and when I do I generally get to the end of a subject in about ten minutes."

"It rather runs in our family," she replied, keeping her eyes rigidly on her work. "There have been some members of it who have written as well as thought."

"Do you ever write?"

"I?—no—I don't want to. There are quite enough writers already, they will soon out-number the readers."

"Still, it might be a pleasant occupation. I should have thought you would have been glad of something to do."

"Oh! I don't mind," and she shrugged her shoulders slightly. "I made a good deal of fuss about it at one time but it wasn't any use. Now I have given up bothering. I can play the piano, dress tastefully and do a little sewing, what more can a woman want?" and her lips curled cynically. "That's all you men expect of us, isn't it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," and he knit his brow thoughtfully. "Personally I don't see why a girl shouldn't have some definite work, if she wants it. What should you like to do?"

Madge was silent a few moments, then she said in a quiet, determined voice, "I have given up thinking about it; it only did more harm than good. I had a lot of wild, eager dreams at one time; I know better than to indulge in them now."

"I think it's rather pleasant to dream," he said.

"I think it's folly," she answered firmly. "The wisest plan is to make the best of the day before you and let the future be a blank."

"I don't see how one can help looking forward to things."

"It requires a certain amount of training, but one is proof against disappointments and caring too much about things, when one has succeeded."

"Have you succeeded?"

"To a certain extent; sufficient to save myself a great deal of useless fretting."

Guy looked at her curiously. She seemed to him to look so strangely immovable and self-contained, was it possible she had ever fretted and pined about anything?

The study of human nature had not yet been included in Guy's catalogue; he could not read "between the lines" of his fellow-creatures.

"Still, I suppose you are looking forward to coming up to town by-and-by," he said presently. "Jack talks about it sometimes."

"Does he? Well, I suppose that is the exception. I certainly always look forward to being with Jack. Not that I care much about going to London, but at any rate it will be away from here."

"You don't like this place?" inquiringly.

"Like it?" and Madge raised her eyebrows very significantly. "Hate is hardly a strong enough word for my sentiments."

"I think you'll like London immensely," he continued, not wishing to dwell on a subject that was evidently a very sore one.

"What do you think I shall like about it?"

"Oh! everything. The rush and excitement and change. It will have been almost worth while to have lived in a dull place."

"I don't agree with you, and I don't think London will please me. If I have a desire it is certainly not for town life."

"I wonder what it is?" he said, hesitatingly.

She was silent a little, then said musingly, "The new young world, across the ocean, where freedom is not a mere name. I am sick of England. People crowd so here, even the rural nooks are now over-run with trippers and defaced with advertisements, and the air is stifled with forms and ceremonies, bigotry, bickerings, and plagiarism. There is so much jostling and struggling, with everybody trying to make his neighbour a stepping-stone for himself. I would like to breathe the fresh free air of the Australian bush and live a life untrammelled by