

IN THE GARDEN OF CHARITY

She closed the door again and came out into the kitchen. She felt dazed, bewildered, cut away from her anchorage. She gazed at the table helplessly; she had no impulse to do her usual work. It seemed impossible to begin again to wash and dust and scour, as if it were an ordinary day. She took a cup in her hand, but put it down again. There was no such thing as need for her any more, no such thing as duty. No one would turn to her, no one would have a claim on her. There would be no weakness for her to shield, no wilfulness to call for her forbearance. Nothing would matter, except that she herself should be clothed and fed and have sleep and shelter. She hurried to the door again. Perhaps, after all, Hagar had relented and was coming back. But no; the uplands were sparkling in dewy freshness, and birds were darting from shrub to shrub; but Hagar was not there.

"Oh, Hagar, come back!" rose like a cry in Charity's heart, while she twisted her hands together as if in desperate supplication.

She went out into the open air and slipped down on the bench beside the door. The glory of the morning, the sparkle of the sea, the singing of the birds, and the beauty of the flowers at her feet—all that was like the hymn and banner of triumph to the disheartened and defeated.

"They're gone," she sighed; "and I've let 'em go."