

which I loathe doing. I was never intended by nature to play the part," and she laughed a little silvery laugh with a hard note in it that grated on the other woman's ear.

"Do you never go and see the people in the village at all, Grace?"

"Never, if I can by any possibility avoid it. I leave all that sort of thing to Guy. He really seems rather to like it, he is so dreadfully fond of poor people. No, Helen, it's of no use to lecture me, I am a hopeless subject," and again she laughed.

"I wasn't going to do anything so audacious as to lecture," Miss Warden answered; "I was only thinking how pleased the village folk would be to see you. I expect you would find them more interesting than you think, and they would find you charming."

"Would they? No, it is of no use, Helen. I simply can't do it, and I certainly should not find them interesting." Lady Warden gave a small, ladylike shiver. "I can't bear the cottages—they smell stuffy, and the people don't understand my point of view any better than I understand theirs. We have nothing in common, absolutely nothing."

"Only common humanity, and a few odds and ends of that kind," Miss Warden's tone was a little dry. "I never think the clay is so very different, when one gets down to it, after all."

"Oh, yes it is, Helen. Those people don't feel things the least as we do, indeed they don't. They have neither as strong nor as deep feelings as we have. Do you suppose that dirty little Mrs. Smith, the undergardener's wife, would lie awake half the night if her husband did not come home as I did last night? Ah, the letters at last, and a telegram. Oh, Helen, I hate telegrams!" and the flush faded all at once out of the pretty face, as the butler handed her the silver salver, piled high with letters, on the top of which lay an orange envelope.

Miss Warden rose and took the telegram in her hand.

"How funny," she said, "it is addressed to Mrs. Warden, and this letter is the same," and she pointed to the envelope which lay beneath the orange one, a quick foreboding of evil passing through her mind. "Let me open this for you, dear," she went on, tearing open the telegram which had arrived too late the day before to be delivered in the remote village of Senley, where Lady Warden lived, and reading it, whilst Lady Warden almost mechanically opened the letter addressed to "Mrs. Warden."

"Oh, Helen, what is it?" she said, in a little pitiful whisper, "here is my own letter to Guy sent back to me. What does it mean?"

"I think, dear, that Guy has had an accident—this telegram says so, and he has been taken to a hospital in London. The letter enlarges on the telegram. See, I will read it to you," and Miss Warden put her arm tenderly round the small trembling figure beside her as she read these words—

"Accident Ward.

"Guy's Hospital.

"July 1st.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am sorry to have to write and tell you that a gentleman has been brought into the hospital this afternoon in an unconscious condition, apparently having had a bad fall. He was found at the bottom of the steps close to London Bridge Station, but has not recovered consciousness, and can therefore give no account of what had happened to him. The only clue to his identity is the enclosed letter. I have just telegraphed to the address upon it. The visiting surgeon has not yet arrived, but the house-surgeon fears that the gentleman is suffering from a severe injury to his head. In

any case you would of course like to come up at once to see him.

"Much regretting the news I am obliged to tell you,

"I am, yours truly,

"Kathleen Slater,

"(Sister of the Ward.)"

"Do you mean to say they have taken Guy to a common hospital!" Lady Warden exclaimed, springing to her feet. "I must go at once to town and get him moved to somewhere decent; and oh, what can have happened to him? 'Unconscious,' the letter says. How horrible—oh, how horrible! My poor old Guy!" and all at once the little lady broke into a storm of tears.

"Let me go at once," she sobbed; "tell them I must catch the very next train to town. I want to go to Guy, and I must get him out of that dreadful place."

In spite of her own grave anxiety about her brother, Miss Warden smiled a little at the curious combination in her small sister-in-law, of genuine trouble about her husband, and indignation at the idea of his being in such a terrible place as a hospital.

"Poor little Grace," she said to herself, as she hastily packed her own bag, "her saving virtue is her love for Guy. It is the one depth in her shallow little nature. I wonder if it will succeed in deepening the whole? It surely must! What a strange apparition she will seem in a hospital ward! How will she affect it? And still more, how will it affect her?"

### CHAPTER III.

It so chanced that Mr. Hancock, the famous surgeon, was "going round," that is to say, paying his visit to the patients in the wards, when Lady Warden and her sister-in-law reached Guy's.

Her little ladyship shuddered more than once as the two ladies walked across the colonnade, where a few students were lounging, to an open door, pointed out to them by the porter at the gate. And when Lady Warden glanced through the door, she shrank back with a renewed shiver.

"I never went inside a hospital before," she whispered, "and it looks quite dreadful."

Miss Warden smiled as she too looked down the long ward, where the late afternoon sun poured in upon the rows of beds with their clean red and white quilts and general air of trim neatness.

"I don't think it looks very dreadful, Grace dear, I only see very clean nice beds and lovely flowers on the table, and I don't think you need be frightened."

"Frightened? I'm not in the least frightened, but I think the whole place is disgusting," and raising her head with a little haughty gesture, she picked up her dainty skirts rather as if it were a muddy lane she were entering instead of an immaculately clean hospital ward.

The hush and silence, upon which hospital etiquette insists during the doctor's visit, lay over the ward; but as the imperious little lady walked down it, glancing at the beds with a certain disdainful expression, one man said to another in an audible whisper—

"Looks as if she thought we was some new kind of a insect—don't she, 15?"

"And so we are, to 'er sort. She ain't never bin in a 'ospital before, you mark my words, 16. And whatever she's come for now beats me."

Lady Warden's face flushed a little as she caught the words, but she walked quickly on to the corner where the ward turned and another vista of beds met her eye.

A screen was at the foot of one bed, and round this a group of men stood silently, beside them a tall woman in blue uniform, and one or

two nurses. To this group Lady Warden made her way without hesitation, and being entirely unawed by the majesty of a surgeon's "going round," touched the arm of the tall woman in blue. Like the rest of the group round the bed, the Sister was absorbed in listening to Mr. Hancock's words and had not heard the approach of the visitors. She turned with a start and uplifted finger.

But Lady Warden, unaccustomed to hospital discipline or indeed to discipline of any sort, exclaimed impatiently in her clear voice—

"I have come to fetch my husband, Sir Guy Warden. Is he here? And is he better?"

The men round the bed turned quickly at the novel sound of the imperious voice, whilst the Sister said quietly—

"Perhaps you will kindly come to my room, until Mr. Hancock has finished going round, and then he will come and tell you about your husband."

"I shall go nowhere till I have seen my husband," the little lady answered angrily; "where is he? Take me to him, please, then I can see the doctor and arrange to have Sir Guy moved."

"A little less noise, please," a quiet voice intervened, and the group of students divided to make room for the surgeon who came forward, and looked gravely down at the little indignant lady with the flushed face and beautiful clothes.

"Is this lady a friend of the patient?" he asked the Sister shortly.

"She is 22's wife, I think," the tall woman answered, and the surgeon turned again to Lady Warden and looked at her closely. Those keen eyes of his gauged pretty rapidly the nature of the woman before him; but there was kindness as well as keenness in the shrewd grey eyes that looked into her blue ones.

"Your husband is going on satisfactorily, madam," he said. "If you will be good enough to go with Sister to her room for a few minutes only, I will come to you; I cannot talk to you here," and he turned back to the bed again.

Lady Warden opened her mouth, but no words came. Sheer, ungovernable astonishment had silenced her, and also to her own no small surprise it made her walk down the long ward again to the Sister's room and recklessly take the seat offered her there, and with equal meekness listen to the few courteous words in which Sister told her of her husband's condition.

No one—no one in her whole life had ever spoken to her as though there were no doubt of her obedience, and she had hardly even recovered her breath again before the surgeon reappeared.

"Forgive my abruptness," he said courteously, "but I am sure you will understand that in a place like a hospital certain laws must be obeyed or we should have anarchy. Now I am glad to be able to tell you that your husband is going on satisfactorily, though he is very, very ill. He was conscious this morning, and has been able to tell us that he thinks he slipped on the steps close to London Bridge Station, but he remembers nothing after that. I will gladly allow you to see him, on condition that you are perfectly quiet and in no way excite him."

"Allow me?" Lady Warden's small proud head became very erect; "he is my husband. Of course I shall be with him. I must be with him."

"Yes, madam, he is your husband, of course, but he is also my patient," the surgeon spoke drily, "and it is my business to cure him. I will arrange that you shall be here as much of the day as can be managed, because your husband is seriously ill; but you will kindly recollect that, as I said before, a hospital has its laws."