

be wanting to smash me; only I know the truth, and you don't. Minnie would have made you the most miserable beggar that walks, if you'd married her. She couldn't have helped it—she's built that way."

"Shut up," growled Dick.

"I will, in a minute. Many a time I've

wished I could give you an eye-opener, old fellow. Why she's kept us all under her feet at home; the gov'nor's afraid of her temper, and mother trembles at her look. As for me, it doesn't matter; but it was too bad that you should be taken in. It's the good fellows, like you, who—"

"Shut up!" Dick's growl was ominously deep.

"Very well. I know you don't like me. Minnie always said I was the sort of chap to be hated." There was a sound like a sob as the boy turned away.

(To be concluded.)

"IF LOVING HEARTS WERE NEVER LONELY—";

OR,

MADGE HARCOURT'S DESOLATION.

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

CHAPTER XXV.

MADGE GETS HER LETTER.

It was with a strange, unnatural feeling, that Madge awoke next day. She felt that a great change had passed over her; that something unusual either had happened, or was going to happen in her life.

What it was, and whether she felt happy or sad she could hardly say, being conscious as yet of nothing but a vague sense of change.

On going downstairs she felt relieved at finding a letter addressed to her in Guy's handwriting. She did not open it at once however; she thought she would wait until after breakfast. It was the first letter she had ever received from him as his wife, and somehow she did not feel inclined to treat it as an ordinary letter. Left alone, she settled herself in an easy chair and broke the seal. She was surprised to find quite a long epistle and wondered what he could have to say, after only one day's absence. This is what she read.

"Marseilles.

"MY DARLING MADGE,—Although I know you will not have missed me much, I can't help thinking you will have wondered a little why I went away so suddenly without saying good-bye. I hope you didn't think it was because I didn't want to; I don't think you would, for you must know by now, that in spite of my boasted carelessness, I worship the very ground you walk on. It was because of this, dear, I couldn't trust myself.

"I have now to make a confession to you and it will be better for me not to beat about the bush. I have behaved like a scoundrel, and have gambled away all my capital in a blind, foolish, and disgraceful way, leaving myself a beggar and disgraced. But I have still enough honour left to see the meanness and despicableness of living with you on your money after what I have done, so I am leaving you and going away for a long time, though hoping still to earn the right to come back again at some future day.

"Thank God, I have never been such a cur as to touch a penny of yours, everything is just as it was when you inherited it, and you will be able to live very comfortably and happily. If I had thought you would miss me much, I don't think I could ever have had the strength to leave you, but because I feel sure you will not want me, but will despise my weakness and look upon me as a disgraced man, I have forced myself

to give up my right to stay beside you always. I dared not come and say good-bye, because I was afraid I couldn't go if I looked into your dear eyes once again. You are capable and self-reliant and will not be afraid, and if I stayed I might only be a source of annoyance to you.

"I'm no hand at letters, as you know, and I can no more tell you all that is in my heart than I can fly, but I want you to remember me, and not be harder on me than you can help. I should like to tell you how I love you, but I couldn't express it in words, and perhaps if I could, it wouldn't interest you.

"Only don't hate me Madge; I couldn't bear that. When you get this, I shall be on the sea, sailing to a far-off land, and I shall think of you all day and all night, and it would break my heart if I thought you didn't care the least little bit, but only despised me.

"I can't give you any address, because I don't know where I'm going, but I will come back some day, when I feel I may, and then, if you will let me, I will try and make up to you for everything.

"You may be quite sure I shall come back, unless I find out that you don't want me, because I love you better than all the world. If I didn't love you so much, I couldn't go away now, and of my own accord endure the agony of separation, just because it seems the only right thing to do. Good-bye, dear, I hope you will keep well and happy; if I could be sure God cared to hear prayers from such as I, I would ask this continually. I must close now or I shall weary you. I feel as if I should like to go on writing for ever, just to keep the link between us from being finally broken.

"Good-bye again. For Jack's sake, if for no other, don't be hard on your loving husband, "GUY FAWCETT."

As Madge read the letter through, a strange pallor spread over her face, and when she had finished, her nerveless hands let it fall to the floor. For some minutes she sat quite still, not a muscle moving, gazing vacantly at the fallen letter. The suddenness of the blow seemed to have stunned her.

Presently she picked it up and read it through again, with a bewildered sense of some great calamity having befallen her, but what, she hardly knew.

Suddenly she looked up with incredulous wonder in her eyes. "He has gone away from me," she told herself, "my husband, Guy, has left me, He thinks I shall be happier without him,

and I do not even know where he has gone. I was going to be kinder to him, but now it is too late—too late."

She got up and paced the room with agitated steps, murmuring, "too late—too late."

Suddenly she paused.

"Why should I care?" she asked; "a week ago I should not have felt like this. After all, he is better away from a heartless wretch like I am. I could not have made him really happy if he had come back. He is better away—better away. I used to be hard enough, I will be hard again. I could not have made him happy as I did not love him; he is better away."

For half-an-hour she paced the room with clenched hands and set face, repeating to herself—"He is better away; I did not love him."

Again she paused in her aimless walk and her eyes fell on her work-basket. Half-unconsciously she opened it and then the unspoken truth began to dawn upon her. She picked it up, the favourite pipe, that she had put away so carelessly. She handled it tenderly, almost reverently.

"I was going to give it to him," she murmured. "He would have been so pleased, and now—and now?"

Ah! what now? She tried to think, but her brain seemed dazed. Slowly the words of his letter passed through her mind; she remembered whole sentences; they seemed branded on her heart.

Then silently and pitilessly it all became gradually clear to her; how that he had gone away and perhaps she would never see him again.

She looked at the pipe. "It was his favourite," she murmured, with great tears gathering in her eyes; "I was going to give it to him myself, and now—"

A sudden rush of feeling overwhelmed her; the dread truth stood revealed; she understood it at last. Falling on her knees, and burying her face in the sofa-cushion in a passion of pain, she moaned, "Oh, God, I loved him! I loved him, and I have ruined him! Now I am alone indeed."

We must perforce draw the veil over what followed. At first she seemed to be struck with blindness even as St. Paul. But straightway there fell from her eyes "as it were scales."

And as she rose she recalled the lines—

"If loving hearts were never lonely,
They might be glad, but not in Thee."

(To be continued.)