

heard of the valuable chinchilla fur. Fancy what a number of these poor little creatures have to be slaughtered to meet the constant demand, and it is in consequence fearfully persecuted; the fur is the softest of all furs. Fortunately the animal is pretty prolific, having six young at a birth, so it will take plenty of hunting before it is quite exterminated. For

fur ties, muffs and ladies' capes the fur is very much in vogue. The little animal only measures fourteen or fifteen inches in length.

It is also particularly cleanly in its habits, like most beautifully furred animals. It is also a vegetable feeder.

"IF LOVING HEARTS WERE NEVER LONELY—";

OR,

MADGE HARCOURT'S DESOLATION.

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST STRAW.

WHO was to tell Madge?

This was the question that filled the minds of the three stunned occupants of the breakfast-table a few hours later.

No one had attempted to taste any food or seemed likely to do so, yet they sat on in silence.

Upstairs lay the still form that had been brought to the house nearly three hours before, and the hardest task of all, a task they all shrank from with fearfulness, remained unfulfilled. Every moment they expected to hear a footstep on the stairs which would make the necessity to speak immediate, and yet no one knew how to do it, nor who should bear the burden of it.

At last Mr. Harcourt pushed away his untasted breakfast, and in a trembling voice exclaimed, "No, I can't do it, it will nearly kill her. I couldn't bear to see her face, I must leave it to you;" and with bent head and wavering steps, he went into his library and shut the door after him.

Guy turned anxiously to Mrs. Harcourt and asked in a hoarse voice, "Who shall it be?"

"If you could?" she answered hastily, "It will not be so bad from you as from me."

Just then a door upstairs opened and someone crossed the landing. Instantly Mrs. Harcourt started up, muttering, "Yes, yes, you, not me!" and before Guy could speak she had gone.

As Madge entered the room she commenced an apology for being so late, for she had slept heavily after her restless night and was much beyond her usual hour.

But she broke off suddenly on seeing the unoccupied table and untasted food and raised her eyes with an exclamation of surprise to Guy, who was standing before the hearth with a white, fixed face.

Instantly a presentiment of evil came over her, and grasping a chair-back she asked fearfully, "Where are the others? what is the matter?"

Guy remained silent, with his gaze on the ground, utterly unable to meet her eyes, and in accents of deepening dread she continued, "Why is no one having breakfast? Why do you look so—"

She paused, then suddenly stepped close up to him, and leaning forward, gasped in a low, horror-struck voice, "Is it Jack?"

But words would not frame themselves in Guy's tortured mind, and it was only after a tremendous effort he was able to begin nervously, "You must prepare—"

But here Madge interrupted him, and with a quick, frightened movement clutched his arm, exclaiming breathlessly: "Don't keep me in suspense; what is it? Is he—hurt?"

The touch on his arm, and the sight of her straining fearful eyes, seemed suddenly to put a new strength into him, and taking her hand between his in a strong clasp, he said, in a low, pitying voice, "Worse?"

"Dead?" and her voice rang out through the room with a strange, hollow sound, while her lips grew white and drawn, and her eyes dilated with suppressed anguish.

He stroked her hand soothingly, while he answered in a voice as gentle as a woman's, "Yes, he met with an accident last night on his way home, and they brought him here three hours ago."

She drew her hand from his and pressed it to her head, a dazed, stunned look resting on her face, but no sound broke from her parched lips.

Guy tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat; he could only stand and gaze at her helplessly. Then gradually the full extent of the truth seemed to dawn upon her, and with something like a groan she turned and walked unsteadily to the door.

Guy hurried after her and sought to detain her, but without looking up or heeding him, she said, "Tell them I don't want anyone to come near me."

Then she passed slowly upstairs into her own room, and locked the door behind her.

What passed in the girl's heart through that awful day no one ever knew. Alone, in a desert of almost intolerable anguish she went through one of those "temptations in the wilderness, which, in succinct or loose form are appointed for every man that will assert a soul in himself and be a man."

God's voice pleaded, "My child, give



CHINCHILLA.

Me thy heart; only trust Me for a little time, and in the end thou shalt understand."

And the voice of the tempter said, "Be hard, be callous, be indifferent. The light and joy have gone out of your life; the days as they come will bring you neither hope, nor love, nor happiness; therefore drown feeling; stem the tide of anguish by the force of your will; there is no rest for man but in the cold torpor of absolute indifference. If you have a God, He does not care. He has other and weightier matters to attend to than the little affairs of men."

In the evening, as the sun was setting in stormy, blood-red splendour over frowning hills, Madge drew up her blind and looked out.

But the sight did not stir either wonder or admiration in her breast, neither did the garden beneath, with its thousand recollections, soften the set lines of the young face.

For as we administer chloroform to numb the pain of the body, so already had Madge begun to drink deep of the fatal draught of callousness and forced apathy to numb the anguish of her soul.

The voice of God had pleaded in vain, and unconsciously the poor tempted soul had fallen down and worshipped the arch-fiend.

A few minutes later, as Guy was sitting alone in the little smoke-room, with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands, striving likewise to master the strange, deep, soul-stirring questions that filled his mind, he heard the door open and someone enter.

He rose hurriedly and turned to meet a pair of dark eyes, whose very calmness sent a chill through his heart.

"Oh, Miss Harcourt, I am so glad