

tion; but I'll set it right—though it can't be undone. Trust me. The days we have spent together have not been so bad after all, and they'll never come again.' Her cheeks were burning still, but the tears were in her eyes. She wanted to hate and scorn him more, to flout him again, but her strength to do it was failing, and every word he said seemed to go right into her heart.

'Let me go,' she pleaded, chokingly; 'I want to be alone.' He made way for her.

'Sweet,' he whispered as she went by, 'you said just now you would rather have been burnt alive than kiss me. I would be burnt alive every day and night for a year if at the end of it I might kiss you again and have you for my own. If I had loved you less, perhaps, it might have come about.' Without a word she passed on. 'And a mean beast I was,' he thought when she had gone, 'but there are limits to all things, even to one's best intentions. My God in Heaven! how I love her.'

Nell was sobbing in her berth downstairs, with her heart full of consternation and bewilderment. 'Oh, my dear Lal,' she cried, 'what you must have thought me, and what can I do? I love you darling—I know I do. I love you with all my heart—with all my heart, darling—but, oh! I'd give the world if I hated Frank a little more—if I did not feel that I'd been—' She put her hand up to her throat, and held her head back with something that was half terror and half shame. 'Oh, is it possible?' she thought. 'I cannot be in love with two men at once. Am I bad and wicked and cruel too?'

The ship reached Leghorn in the grey of the morning. Merreday waking some hours later from a miserable, fitful sleep, asked how long it stayed.

'Eight hours, monsieur,' the Italian steward answered. 'Madame went on shore early.' What the relations of the two were, with the indulgence of his nation, the man had never concerned himself. 'But she has left a little letter, which I will bring.' It was the only scrap he ever had from her:

*'I have gone home. We could not have seen each other again after last night. I shall end my way.'*

'Great Heaven! I must get up and go after her at once'—but when he tried to do so he found that he could not raise his head from the pillow.

CHAPTER X.

Helen Halstead felt as she made that strange journey back to England that she was a very wicked woman. If she had thought about it at all she would probably have called herself good lately. She had always intended to spend a really meritorious life, fulfilling all her obligations to the best of her ability, to enjoy herself as much as possible, and to die, if she ever contemplated dying at all, as gracefully as possible; and to be buried as befitted the social position in which it had pleased death to find her.

She had, especially during the last week or two of her engagement, been thoroughly in love with Lawrence Halstead, in a charming and very young womanly manner. She had contemplated being devoted to him, and making him an excellent wife. Now it was simply all at end. She loved him, that was certain, and she was longing to get back to him, though she could not help her thoughts occasionally straying in another direction. She felt that the one thing on earth that would really comfort her and set things right would be an unmitigated cry on his shoulder. She had a distinct vision of it. She rather hoped that it would come off under circumstances that would permit of his wearing the floppy overcoat; then she could pull up the collar against her face, and it would have a soothing effect; unless, of course, he stooped his dear head, and— but, no, she was not a woman of the period, in spite of her intellectual excursions, and she could not indulge in mental caresses, even from her own husband. But she felt quite sure that he would console her beautifully, and she was content to leave it vague. She could not bear to think of the manner in which he had been treated. All the same, deep down in her own heart she was angry and disappointed. She felt that he had not lived up to the traditions of ill-treated heroes. He ought to have followed them up on a flash of lightning, have found them at last, and there should have been a terrific interview. He had taken it all a little too calmly. He had not, as yet managed to hurl even a reproach at her, or to kill Frank, or to blow his own brains out, but only to allow a rumor of a divorce to be spoken of in an Italian cafe.

Frank would have acted differently. He had behaved shamefully, but she could not help feeling that he would have been a glorious lover. She had a vision of what life might have been with him—on boardship, for instance, and in perpetual sunshine, with a tempest-shaken perspective of maddening joy and laughter. The days they had spent together were burnt on her brain. She could feel the touch of his hand still, and hear the sound of his voice in her ears. She turned her thoughts desperately towards Lal. Oh, yes, she certainly loved him with all her heart, and only lived to hear him say that he forgave her, and to feel for all the rest of her years she would be safe by his side. She would do everything in the world to make him love her again, if he would only not divorce her. He was strength and home, and comfort—the background and surrounding of her life; but in the foreground, and in the centre, do what she would, there stood Frank Merreday; and she was not strong enough to turn aside and put him wholly away from her. She hated herself, but that helped her on no farther.

(To be Continued.)

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