

reckless than he used to be, and at times irritable.

And the cause was this: he had grown to love, in the best sense of the word, his beautiful, unresponsive wife. Every week his love grew stronger and struck deeper down into the roots of his heart, so that he could take no pleasure in anything apart from her. And every week he felt her unresponsiveness more, and gradually came to exaggerate it until he persuaded himself into believing that she did not really care for him at all. The quiet, little attentions which she did not fail to render him, were too matter-of-fact to count as anything, and her continued indifference to his movements hurt him far more than if she had over-plied him with questions.

If he remonstrated, she only looked at him gravely, and either said nothing at all, or alluded, more or less indirectly, to their former compact.

This last goaded him, because he was mad with himself for not being able to act up to it without caring, and partly because it only showed how luke-warm her affection still was.

And still the best part of him, the part that had never yet been called into action, remained smothered by his habitual easy-going temperament, his love of enjoyment and his dislike of worries or troubles of any kind.

Instead of facing the matter manfully and trying to surmount his trouble, he sought to run away from it.

And alas! how many strong-hearted men and women do likewise; striving desperately to break away, until after repeated vain efforts, in which energy and strength are unnecessarily wasted, they are obliged to succumb and let the waters close in all round.

Better face the storm bravely from the first, and battle with it with all one's might.

From the aching longing and restless feverishness that reigned in his heart whenever he was with Madge, Guy sought to find forgetfulness and ease in excitement, and the form he chose was gambling.

He knew it was hateful to her, and sometimes in the very midst, her pale, calm face would rise before him reproachfully, but except for the moment, he took no heed of it.

"She does not care what becomes of me," he would muse half fiercely, "I am nothing to her; why should I consider her? I must do something to pass the time. If she cared it would be different."

So he staked higher, and let himself be drawn more deeply into the net.

One word from her, one look of hurt disapproval would have saved him, but night after night he came in late with a flushed, excited face, and she never once asked him where he had been, or evinced any interest in his movements. He would look hungrily for it, time after time. He would suggest staying with her lest she were dull, or taking her out, but the cold response was always the same, and so he believed his company was distasteful to her, and stayed away longer than he might otherwise have done.

And this was the woman who, two short years ago, had described the love she sought, and which alone could satisfy her as "A love that is not afraid of sacrifice—that shines brightest when the strife is fiercest; and grows ever stronger with the passing years."

The priceless boon lay at her feet! The best thing in all the wide world was within her grasp—and because her eyes still gazed ever at her sorrow and her heart still clung to its anguish—she passed it by and knew not that it was there. Verily, the angels might weep tears of blood over the blindness and pain sown everywhere in this world of ours by the Demon Self.

Meanwhile, early in the month of February, they decided to journey to the Riviera in search of sunshine.

The cold spring winds were very trying to Madge, and observing that the cold, pinched look on her face grew daily more apparent, Guy decided to start at once.

When he proposed the plan she acquiesced in her usual quiet manner, and shortly after went to pack up, preparatory to a hurried departure.

Guy stood on the rug with his hands behind him and looked moodily at the floor. He was wondering if she would have preferred to go without him, with a lady companion. He thought he had better suggest it; but then if she should agree, what of him? Could he let her go, and stay on there alone, where every nook and corner reminded him of her? Could he possibly exist without a glimpse of her for perhaps three whole months? And if he did, might she not forget even the little liking she had for him? This was all he cared about in the world! She was "life" and all things to him now! No, no, there was no actual need for it, he must go with her!

Then he shrugged his shoulders and called himself names. "I never would have believed it of you, Guy Fawcett," he said. "You are like any silly school-boy who is head over ears in love with a girl twice his age. Why on earth can't you be a man and defy her to have such a hold on you?"

He drew himself up sharply, as if he had already succeeded. Then he crossed the room and stood beside her beloved flowers. He touched tenderly the petals of a beautiful Christmas rose. He bent down and rested it against his lips and cheek, and something glittered on the rose that was not dew, but like it.

"I can't help it," he murmured, "I love her with all my heart and soul. I would give my life to make her happy."

Then he again drew himself up sharply, and this time he hastily left the room. He took his coat and hat and went out into the night, for he felt as if he could not bear the pain in his heart. He was going to try and drown it in the usual way. He had learnt his heart's secret at last. It had taken him nearly twelve months, but there was no doubt about it now. He knew what she was to him. That night he staked higher than he had ever done before and, unfortunately, he won.

Two days later they alighted from the train in Monte Carlo, and drove at

once to a small private hotel, facing the sea.

Their sitting-room was in the front, and from the balcony commanded a beautiful view of the coast, and a dawning gleam of rapture shone in Madge's eyes as she leaned on the iron paling and looked around. A faint colour flushed her usually pale cheeks, and she breathed quick and fast, as if the soft, balmy air had already revived her.

Guy stood by and watched her; and thought, as he was always thinking, how beautiful she was. He was glad he had not remained behind.

"You like it, Madge?" he asked wistfully.

"Yes, it is beautiful," and she shaded her eyes and looked across the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

"You will be happy here?"

She did not answer, but looked away from him.

"I want you to be," he continued, in low pleading tones. "You can't think how it hurts me to see you always so quiet and sad and careworn."

"You shouldn't think about it," and the old slight ring of ungraciousness sounded in her voice. "It is natural to me to be quiet and thoughtful; you wouldn't have me go against nature?"

"I don't think it is altogether natural," he answered. "I think you indulge in morbidness."

She glanced at him quickly in astonishment, then turned away rather haughtily.

"You may be right," she said, "but I don't think you know anything about it," and she stepped past him towards the window.

But he caught her hand and held it fast between his.

"Now you're offended," he exclaimed, "and you'll go in and hate me, I know you will. But I can't let you. Promise me, you won't hate me, Madge," and there was an undercurrent of passionate emotion in his voice.

She looked at him with a half-bewildered air and the flush in her cheeks deepened. She was quite taken aback by his earnestness.

"No! why should I hate you?" she said hurriedly, "I am not offended; I only think you don't understand."

"But I should if you would only let me. Why won't you talk to me more? I'm not such a thoughtless, empty-headed fellow that I can't sympathise."

But she shook her head and tried to draw away her hand. "It would only make you miserable too, and that would be foolish. I don't want to be a burden to you. You've been so kind to me; I want you to enjoy life."

"Enjoy life," he repeated bitterly; "and are you so blind you can't see that enjoyment is impossible to me if you have no part in it? Don't you know that I care for nothing in the world but you, and want nothing but your love?"

"You have it, such as it is," she answered, with a strained look in her eyes.

"Such as it is, yes! but I can't be satisfied with that. I know I thought I could long ago, but I was wrong. I haven't got your heart, Madge, and nothing else will do."