

THE GUARDED FLAME

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slouch hat in hand, with bowed head—the one that she had never seen except in pictures. Behind them stood shadows more vague: Fellows of the Royal Society, representatives of the universities, meaningless forms on the drifting grey background of her dazed thoughts—his old colleagues from Liverpool, the staff of the Museum in Jermyn Street, humble old friends beckoned to their places on the fringe of the mourning circle, by the dead hand.

But *he* was king of the shadows: as she saw him weep, her tears fell faster, till the shadows faded and were gone, and she and her mother stood alone beside the earth-filled trench.

He came back three days after the funeral and asked her to be his wife. At fifty-six, he was splendid—never a strong man really, but the life in him most wonderful. The time had come, he said, for him to think of marriage; and his kind eyes smiled at her. And again he asked her if she could marry him. But first, before she answered, she must think of all she was giving up—it was a great thing that he asked of her. Most carefully he concealed the material advantages of the offer. In fact, the poor widow was left almost without means. Some small pension, a mere pittance, was all—but this the daughter must not know, if he could save her from knowing it.

Yes, she says. All that she gives up is nothing to her. She is simplicity itself: a daughter of science, handmaid of these old thinking men—without dreams, without cravings.

Then came the joy in learning that her mother is to go with her to the house by the sea. It will be all just the same—husband to work for, instead of father.

In this manner her quiet married life began. In the silent world of thought, time is a thought-standard only, to be taken from a shelf and used in some measuring-work, to be replaced upon a shelf and forgotten till the dust hides it; in a sense, the years are flying, in a sense the years stand still; rest is but an aspect of motion; soon her mother lay by her father's side; it was yesterday that a priest put her hand in his, yet to-day is her twenty-third birthday, her twenty-fourth, her twenty-fifth birthday.