

THE LONELY TRAVELLER

He sat at his writing-table, a sheet of paper before him, a pen wet with ink in his hand; but as yet no word had been written on that fresh sheet. He had not thought that the letter would be so difficult to write, and though he was the possessor of a particularly facile pen and a command of good language, yet he could not bring himself to form the sentences which had been racing through his head for days—nay, for weeks. He knew—none better—that they would be like a sentence of doom to the woman who was to receive them, but he was past pity—past everything but the thought of self and advancement. Was it, his fault that he had fallen in love before his time? Was it his fault that something in him prompted him strongly to cut himself adrift from all hampering ties—til his career was made and fortune within his grasp? Surely those were only the dictates of prudence after all!

What was that quotation that had haunted him for so long? "He travels fastest who travels alone." And Arnold Mason intended to travel fast; he was determined to make a mark—to establish himself before the eyes of men—to make the business that owned his name more famous than it had ever been before. And to do all this he must let nothing come between him and his work—not even the woman who loved him and whom he loved in his own fashion. So he must travel alone.

And to do this he must cut himself free from the fetters that bound him and Lucy Aldham together. It had begun by a boy-and-girl friendship, and had ripened with years into something more—particularly, perhaps, on her side, and, with the spring of youth in his blood and Lucy always near him, during that summer holiday which he spent with her people in the country the inevitable happened, and Arnold went back to town an engaged man. That was a year ago, and since then his business had made immense strides.

He had come to the parting of the ways, and the letter to Lucy must be written. In a week's time he would sail for America to conduct some business of delicacy and importance to him and the firm; it would in all probability lead to greater things, and prove but a stepping-stone toward the fortune of which he dreamt, waking and sleeping.

But how difficult it was. He felt his own dastardly deceit as he wrote, the words seemed to burn him as he read them. It was impossible to tell the girl that he had outgrown her; that he must travel alone with ambition, not with her—in short, that he no longer wanted her. No—and so, manlike, he tried to throw some of the blame on her slender shoulders.

And so, Lucy, we must bring our engagement to an end, for I cannot keep you waiting an indefinite time. All my prospects are still vague—it may be years before I am free to settle down, and I will not sacrifice your best years, and keep you to that most wearing thing—a hopeless engagement. It will be far better for you, dear, to be free—and perhaps for me, too. I cannot see you wasting the best years of your young life. Forget me, dearest, and forgive me if I have brought pain into your life. I care always.—Yours ever, Arthur Mason.

left her behind on the road, and he was forging ahead now, no longer needing her help or sympathy. He could do without her, and so he had no compunction in tossing her aside like an old glove.

It was not an exhilarating thought and for a time it seemed as if Lucy would almost succumb to the blow the man had dealt her. But an innate pride and reticence gave her courage, and she came out of the trial with calmness and determination—a resolve to make the best of what life had left for her; not to sink under this trial, but to find some other interest in life instead of love.

The idea that people would pity her was in itself torture, but she steered herself to bear it, and perhaps one was more amazed than Arnold Mason himself at the calm, composed little note he received from her, in which she acquiesced in his decision without apparently a murmur.

Ten years later Arnold Mason's name was pretty well known throughout Europe. He was spoken of as one of the cleverest and most successful financiers of his generation, a man of immense wealth, and greater power—a man whose name was spoken with almost bated breath by a certain section of people who were absolutely in his power, to make or mar as he willed. He was aware of his power, and used it wisely, if sometimes a little imperiously, and every year as it passed left him richer than before. He had realized a good many of his dreams, at any rate, and he was still travelling alone. There had never been any time in his strenuous life for regret and Lucy Aldham and that one halcyon summer remained just a blurred memory—so faded, indeed, that it only very rarely rose and troubled him.

More than ever now, he felt he had left Lucy far behind him on the road; she could never have kept pace with him in that triumphant progress of his to fame and fortune. So that all had been for the best—for his best, at any rate.

Yet even to that man of millions moments of intense loneliness came. Other men, successful, wealthy, had their homes—their palaces never seemed like a home to him—their families, some gracious lady to preside at the head of their tables; they had a sheltered garden to which they could retreat after the heat and burden of the day's work—a garden of peace and domestic happiness. He travelled alone, and by the world in general he was more feared and admired than loved.

He worked hard—perhaps harder than ever, for work is an anodyne—a panacea for all evils, and now and then his loneliness came upon him with such force that he was obliged to flee from it. And so his palace in Park Lane, his country seat in the Midlands, were simply like hotels to him—places where he stayed for a few days at a time, always surrounded by a party of men—he had no home.

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don't you know that someone has said, "He travels fastest who travels alone?" —I travelled fast—but it's the loneliness that's killing me by inches. And unless the woman I love can help me—no one can. "The woman you love?" she repeated. "You mean—"

"Ah! you know—you must know," he cried, his voice a little shaken. "She raised her hand. "Stop," she said; "let me hear first about this girl."

He broke into eager, headlong speech. It was not his fault, he said, that he had outgrown his first love—that he had found her a hindrance rather than a help to him in his career—and it was not her fault. They would never have been happy together, for he would have been far ahead of her, and she would never have liked the strenuous life. It was better for both to part—and so on, and so on.

Lady Strachan listened with a strange smile curving her perfect lips. Her white gown brushed softly over the turf as they paced up and down in the shade, the man speaking eagerly—forcefully.

"That's your point of view," she said, evenly, as he paused; "just the man's side. Have you thought of the other side at all? Have you guessed, in the very least degree, what that girl must have suffered till Time came and healed the wound and lulled her into forgetfulness? For some women do not easily get over the shattering of all their ideals, the tearing away of all their cherished illusions. Perhaps you don't know what that anguish is—what it must have been to the girl you thought you loved, but who was nothing to you when she came in the way of your ambition. Men don't stop to think of the creatures that must be hurled out of their way to allow the juggernaut car to ride over them."

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Arnold, it would never do. We've outgrown the want of each other, when you left me that time I wanted you more than I had ever needed anyone; now I can do without you. I've learnt the lesson too well to forget it. Don't you see that? One can't go back. If you had stuck to me then—but you couldn't. You did right in your own eyes, no doubt; it was the wise and prudent course, but wisdom and prudence don't take much account of a woman's heart—a woman's illusions and hopes. You must remember, too, that a few years after your departure out of my life I married, and married happily. I respected and admired my husband more than I can tell you; his loss could never be filled. He was far too good to me and for me. I can't forget that. He gave so much, and was content with so little in return.

"And I travelled alone—must I be alone always?" he said, passionately. "For no other woman can ever be to me what you are—what you were."

"Ah! Don't, Arnold. Don't delude yourself into thinking that. You may feel all that now, but it was not so once. You could do without me."

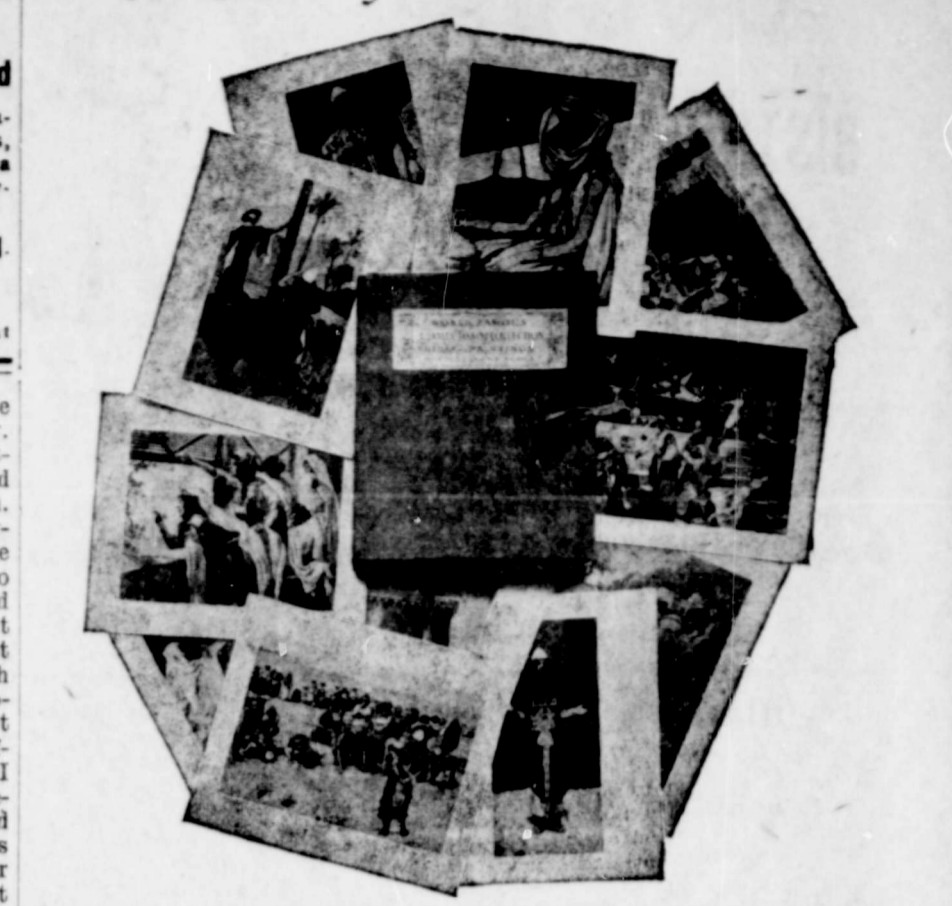
He bowed his head to the gentle reproach in her voice. There was no more to be said, though he pleaded his cause long and urgently. It was no use. He must travel alone to the end of the chapter. And the next day he drove away from the Manor House on his way to town, leaving behind him the end of his dream—all the hopes that had cheered him for so long.

His reflections as the express whirled him away towards the hub of the universe were not very happy. He had made a complete mess of things; whatever financial and social and public success he had achieved, they were all as nothing when compared with happiness—and that no money could ever buy. Happiness and love. Things which a poor man may possess and count himself rich, while the millionaire has to go without them.

How Lucy had revenged herself upon him! He writhed a little as he thought. Who would have thought that the quiet country girl could blossom out into the brilliant woman of rare gifts and attainments? It was like the transformation of the chrysalis into the butterfly.

And now she was farther away from him than ever. He had set that barrier—and she would never remove it. "He travels fastest who travels alone." Those words, upon which he had founded his successful career, haunted him. Every turn of the wheels of the racing train seemed to hum them out until he wishes he had never heard them; they had been his undoing. What was there left for him in life now? Success, riches, power were like dust and ashes before him; there was nothing left, unless—

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ness and violence will be proof that love existed not or has flown. If he love her he will remember the sacredness of his union to her, and he will not value her solely from the use he can make of her. The sentiment of affection that will cement the union of husband and wife must not be born of admiration or contemplation of the physical and is not easiest elicited by corporal exhibition. Let it be founded on something higher and more sacred. "Keep thy love holy or it will destroy thee." Someone has recently said that holy love will make holy marriages. It has been written that wedlock is "a royal road broader and less rugged than other ways of life." But that is only when wedlock is regarded as sacred—as sacred a condition as the priesthood. In the Christian religion both are Sacraments. Let the State aid the Church, let teachers aid priests and ministers, let parents take a hand in instructing all on the exalted and sacred dignity of the married.—Rev. C. F. Thomas.

Where He Was Best "I can run faster than you can Hal," bragged Jimmie. "That's all right," returned Harry, "but I can stand faster than you can, and when war breaks out they'll think more of me than they will of you."

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