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Sweet Eva!

CHAPTER XXV
You know people always say that the first year of married life is difficult—and it is, Peter! Everything's strange—and, after all, we didn't know one another very well when we were married, did we? And so . . . she floundered helplessly.

"You don't believe me," she finished at last faintly. Peter heaved. "You don't know how sad you look," he temporized. "Bonnie, you used to be all smiles before you were married! What did we give you your nickname for, I should like to know—but to see you now!—why even Kitty says . . ."

"Kitty!" She drew her arm from his; so he had been discussing her with Kitty. She stood still. "Shall we wait for the others?" she said. "Now you're wild with me— I tried to take her hand. "Don't be wild, Bonnie . . ."

"I'm not, of course, I'm not. I couldn't ever be with you. . . ." She squeezed his fingers and let them go as Philip and Kitty joined them. "We'll leave you to go the rest of the way alone," she said, lightly. "Having chaperoned you so far . . ."

They exchanged good-nights, and presently Eva and Philip were walking back alone. The soft warm darkness was all about them. It was an ideal night for lovers, but Eva and her husband walked a pace apart, and neither of them knew how the other's pulses were racing, or how much each of them longed to break down the barrier between them.

Eva stole a glance at Philip. He was walking rather fast, and with his head held high. She could see the outline of his big figure, and the red glow of the cigarette at which he was puffing with unnecessary violence. She longed to slip a hand through his arm and try and drive the moodiness from his face; to see him once again, lighthearted and inconsequent as she had first known him, but she was afraid of repulsion or what would be worse—dutiful acceptance of her timid overture.

CHAPTER XXVI
The Winterticks moved up to town at the end of September. "I shall be down every week-end," so Philip told his mother when she shed a few tears about it. "It's only natural that Eva should want her own home . . ."

"She could be absolute mistress here," Mrs. Wintertick protested. "I am quite willing to give up the reins to her, if it's only to keep you with me, Phil. You can't realize how lonely I shall be." He did realize it quite well, and his heart ached for her. "Perhaps if you spoke to Eva yourself," he suggested. But Mrs. Wintertick would not do that; she was a little afraid of her son's wife; the memory of her own share in this luckless marriage was a constant source of remorse to her.

She thought that Philip had aged years; it tore her heart to see the hard unhappiness of his eyes. The evening before they were to leave the Highway House Philip wandered round the garden alone. Now it had come to the point, he hated going. It had been a particularly fine September, and as yet there were only a few signs of autumn in the garden, only the faintest tinge of yellow and gold in the trees. Philip was essentially a country man. He loved an outdoor life, and

"There'll be a moon to-morrow, I should think," Philip said, suddenly. "Yes—" she almost laughed at the banality. "You'll be able to do a little more worshipping," he said, in a hard voice. "Do you remember the night I found you?"

She interrupted quickly. "Yes, I remember." They walked a little way silently. "It's all rot!" he broke out then, irritably. "I can't understand why women will be so ridiculous! As if wishing to the moon is any good—your wish never came true, did it?"

"No—" "And yet, I suppose you still believe in it?" No answer. They had reached the house now; Philip opened the door and stood aside for her to enter. He glanced at her with jealous eyes as she stepped into the light of the hall.

"You said that some day you would tell me what you were wishing that night," he said abruptly. "Did I?" She raised her eyes for an instant and dropped them again. "Perhaps I will—some day," she submitted lightly. She turned towards the stairs. "Good-night!" she said hurriedly.

Philip suddenly caught her hand; she shrank back against the wall to get as far away from him as she could, and he imprisoned her there with an arm on either side of her. "You thought I wanted to kiss you in the drawing-room this evening," he said rapidly. "You were right—I did. I could make you kiss me now, if I chose." He bent a little towards her. He saw how the colour ebbed from her face, and how wide her eyes grew, and it gave him a sort of angry pleasure to know that he had some power over her, even if it were only to make her afraid of him.

Somehow upstairs a door banged, and Philip moved quickly. Eva saw her opportunity and seized it; she dodged under his arm and ran across the hall and up the stairs.

the thought of a flat—expensive and luxurious though it might be—stirred him. He went down to the stables where he had found his wife that night talking to the groom, and stroked the soft nose of the brown horse which she had been fondling then. He felt somehow as if he were saying goodbye to everything for ever. It was like shutting up a book which one has enjoyed reading, and which has unexpectedly ended in tragedy.

He went out into the gardens and out into the fields beyond. Every step of the way he was reminded of his father. Almost every tree and gateway had some vivid memory of the many times they had gone this way together.

He lingered out in the sunset so long that he was late for dinner. Eva and Mrs. Wintertick had already begun when he got in. It was rather a silent meal. After the first quick glance at her husband Eva knew instinctively what he was feeling. Though he had said no word to her, she knew that he hated leaving his home, and that this last night was one of great sadness for him.

His face to-night was a constant reproach to her. She avoided looking at him as much as possible. The little pleasure which she had found in arranging and furnishing the flat faded into the background. She was conscious of a sort of home-sick feeling herself as she realized that this was their last night in the Highway House.

She had not been happy here, and yet . . . well, it was Philip's home, and she loved it for his sake. When dinner was ended she followed Mrs. Wintertick to the drawing-room. Conversation was difficult. Eva knew that the elder woman was blaming her for taking Philip away. She rose eagerly when Mrs. Wintertick asked her to play something. She sat down at the piano, glad of an opportunity to put an end to the forced conversation.

The song she had been trying the night when Philip tried to kiss her still stood on the rack. She turned a sheet absently and looked at the words:— Though all the skies are clouded, Though all the portents lour, Somewhere—to someone This is the potent hour.

The hour that comes softly To women and men, Who only know thereafter That they were happy—then! The music was soft and dreamy, and seemed to be very much one with the words. She played it over with the soft pedal down, the words ringing in her head:— The hour that comes softly To women and men, Who only know thereafter That they were happy—then! (To be continued.)



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