

only thing I am strong enough to do, yet is to love you. I believe it is the only thing I have ever done strongly in my life. It will not be the last. I can see already how it is going to alter everything. Good God! What is a man going to do, with life before him, and such a feeling in it! It will take the work of ten to hold him. There isn't a woman of the whole of you that knows what it is. There's more of you than any other woman I ever knew, but you don't know; you can't know."

She sat on the edge of the chair, a little sideways, leaning back, just as she had dropped there when he asked her to sit by him, her hands clasped over the medicine-case, with whose rubber strap she had bound her fingers down. She watched him with a look which no plummet in his soul could fathom.

"You are wrong!" he cried. "You are cold, unnatural! It was unwomanly in you to tell me I was only nervous!"

"It is not the first time that a woman has been called unwomanly for saying the truth," said Doctor Zay, without flinching. "I do not doubt I have seemed unwomanly to you in many respects. Your ideal and my fact are a world's width apart."

"You have never seemed unwomanly to me, in all that we have been through,—never once!" said Yorke. "I have thought you, from the very first—you have been to me the loveliest woman I ever knew!" His voice shook. She sat, without a change either in her attitude or expression, regarding him with narrow, inscrutable eyes.

"I have not thought," he went on, with gathering strength, "I have not dared to think, that I had won anything from you,—a sick man whining on your bottles for the breath of life! And I know that others, other men—I understand my cruel disadvantage; it is that that galls me so!"

"Other men have nothing to do with it," she said gravely. "I have had different things to do from thinking what would be pleasing to men. My life is not like other women's. It is not often that I am troubled in this way. I do not mean to treat you harshly, believe me. But I do not say hard things easily; perhaps I am out of practice."

"Surely," said Yorke, smiling despite himself at this, "you have known what it is to be loved."

"Yes, I have been beloved," she answered simply. "I suppose no woman avoids that. If I had not, I should have no right to tell you that you are not in love. I should not have any standard."

"Nothing can give you any such right," he repeated feverishly.

"I do not know how to continue this discussion," she said, after a painful pause. "I seem to have few ideas and fewer words for such a purpose. I can find nothing to tell you but what I said in the carriage. My professional responsibility gives me my right."

"And I reiterate what I said in the carriage,—that I believe you of what you call your responsibility."

"Then I must renew my answer,—that this is a thing you cannot do. So we are repeating ourselves, like history, and proving how worse than vain it is to talk in this way."

"You speak as if I were a creature lent to you,—entrusted to you, soul and body!" blazed the young man.

"So you were," said the physician quietly.

"So you are."

"If anything could make me *unlove* you," said Yorke, with calm desperation, "such a speech as that would do it. But it works just the other way. Listen to me, Miss Lloyd. I will love you. You cannot help it. I will tell you so. You cannot help that. You must accept it. You must endure it. You must remember it. I shall not allow you to forget it."

One swift, dangerous gleam darted from her guarded eyes. The whole woman seemed impelled by some elemental instinct, mightier than he, mightier than herself, to warn him off. She did not trust herself to speak, and this gave him the first advantage he had felt; he hastened to avail himself of it.

"It is insufferable that any woman should treat any man as you treat me. Because I am a patient, am I not a man? Because I dislocated my ankle and concussed my brain (as is quite evident now, if it never was before), am I to be set aside like a hysterical girl, for the state of whose limp emotions her medical attendant feels in honor bound to look out?"

"Can you tell me any reason," asked Doctor Zay serenely, "why I should *not* feel the same sense of honor that a man would in the case you describe? But I have never called you hysterical."

"You consider my love a symptom, I suppose,—another symptom; like a nervous sinking-turn, or my afternoon headaches."

"Since you press the question, Mr. Yorke, I do, indeed. That is just what I consider it."

"It's a pretty serious one," fiercely, "as you will find out before you have done with me. It is beyond the reach of any pellet in your little case; the remedy is not included in your *Materia Medica*."

"That may be true. But Nature has her own unerring prescriptions. A single dose of absence—even in the first attenuation—will work a recovery which will astonish yourself, sir. It will not surprise me."

She said the last five words with a vague sadness, elusive as the sigh of a ghost, which did not escape the lover's fine ear. She rose as she spoke, and pushed back her chair. She stood

looking down at him. For a silent moment his suffering and weakness seemed to plead with her splendid nerve and strength, and to find them implacable; yet to urge her, perhaps, against her own determination, into the tone of something like self-defence, in which she said,

"What should I be, if I could take charge of a man like you,—a sensitive man, stricken down in perfect health by such a serious nervous shock, knowing nothing of its subtler effects; a man brought up from the grip of death inch by inch back to life, dependent on the creature who saves him, confusing his gratitude and his idleness and his suffering with other feelings so much greater,—what sort of a woman should I be, if I did not feel responsible for him? I should despise myself, Mr. Yorke, if I let you drift into such breakers as those; if I allowed you to believe that this is love you feel for me. I should think it was the most unwomanly thing I ever did in my life!"

He had risen to reply to her, and they confronted each other, flashing and pale.

"Not a word more to-night," she said authoritatively. "It is unsafe and wrong; I cannot permit you to talk in this way another moment. Go back to your room, and go to bed. Sleep if you can. Go home next week; as you intended. It will be the wisest thing you have done for a long while."

"I must see you again to-morrow," said Yorke, stretching out his hand blindly.

"Very well," she replied, without hesitation. "I do not advise it, but I will not refuse it. Only go now, and—I hope you will sleep," she added sorrowfully.

She stood watching him as he tottered to the door. Had he seen the expression of her face he would have got no comfort from it; he would not even have understood it; yet he would have felt it to be an indefinable gain that he had not missed it.

"Mr. Yorke!" He turned drearily around.

"Put yourself in my place for a moment. Reverse our positions."

Her words died before his protesting, passionate man's eyes. Just then she pitied them more than any woman's she had ever seen.

"I can't," he said hoarsely. "It makes a madman of me!"

#### XI.

The next morning it rained. Mr. and Mrs. Butterwell therefore experienced astonishment when their invalid lodger appeared at breakfast with the request that Mr. Butterwell would drive him out to conduct some business relative to his uncle's estate.

"You look fitter to be abed and tended up," said his hostess, halting at that stage of latent sympathy which we are moved to express to the sick by active severity. "I'll read to you, if that will keep you home and teach you sense. I'll read poetry, if you like. I can. Isaiah has a copy of Tenyson's In Memoriam (I gave it to him Christmas), though I must say I never could find head nor tail on it more'n on a roasted chicken. I'll read you anything but the Bible. It's against my principles to read the Bible to sick folks. It ain't cheerful enough."

Mr. Butterwell had the liver complaint once, and he got such a shine for reading in the Minor Prophets and the Imprecatory Psalms I told the Doctor it was the most serious symptoms about him; and it was. He'd have pined right along if I hadn't got him into the genealogies of Matthew, and so eased off on to the secular page of the Congregationalist, and slipped him up one day into Mark Twain's Innocents Abroad."

"Why, *Sar-ah!*" said Mr. Butterwell patiently. But he went out to harness his big sorrel at once, since, if Mr. Yorke wished to ride, that ended the matter. Mr. Butterwell failed to see what his liver complaint had to do with poor Jed's estate, and more than ever realized his own deficiencies in general conversation.

"It is time I began to thank you for an infinite series of obligations, Mrs. Butterwell," said Yorke, pushing back his chair from the breakfast table. "I am going home next week."

"Infinite fiddlesticks!" retorted Mrs. Butterwell. "Going to—Surinam?" Her soft eyes peered at him gently as a bird's over these terrible words. "Why, Doctor hasn't got half through with you?"

"I am afraid she has, quite through," said the young man. "I am going by Monday's boat, if I can get over to Joursboro' in season to take it. I shall find the best man I can round here, and leave Uncle Jed's affairs in the hands of a local lawyer. I am not strong enough to be bothered with them. I have written to my mother that I shall join her at Nahant as soon as possible."

"Does Doctor think you're fit to take the journey?" asked Mrs. Butterwell, after some studious consideration.

"I didn't ask her. She approves of my going."

"Doctor knows best about things in her line," replied Mrs. Butterwell, closely regarding her lodger. "But between you and me, there's one thing that ain't in it."

"What is that?" asked Yorke, with a pale smile.

"Men-folks," said Mrs. Butterwell succinctly. She considered this a truly scholarly reply, which it was not precise to amend by foot-notes. Her shrewd, homely face lengthened as Mr. Yorke limped away. Mrs. Butterwell had received a shock.

Doctor Zay was called out early that day, and kept out late. Yorke attended to his business, and made no effort to see her till night. She was away at dinner, and he took tea in his own room. The storm continued. He passed an idle, almost an entirely solitary day. He had some scientific books of Wallace's, which she had lent him; he tried to read; the thing was impossible. The rain came in gusts upon the windows, with lulls between; he listened to it with a sense of personal irritation at the nervous combat of sound and silence, which served as a shallow outlet to the steady torrent of his feeling.

We find it in our way, as we get well past these sharp alternations of shine and shade, to miss something of sympathy with what time has blurred into gray backgrounds for ourselves; to see less of the dignity, less of the pathos, more of the frailty, and more of the folly of the great passions before which youth and vigor and hope and rectitude are beaten down like breath before the oncoming of cyclones. And yet I think it is not the best way of ageing, to grow so gray at the heart, and that it were what might almost be called a coarse thing to smile at our young fellow here, writhing in the grip of his first elench with life. He loved, or thought he did. It is better to be off with our hats and down on our knees to illusions that we have long since overthrown, than to withhold from the most transparent of them the reverence which is the eternal due of human conflict.

He sought her in the evening, through the steady downfall of the storm. She had never invited him to make use of that other door, which connected her parlor with the body of the house. It was so wet that he ventured to get there before the office hours were over, thinking that no one would be there. He found himself mistaken. A patient was in conference with her, and he waited awkwardly in the office till the woman had gone.

This little misstep seemed, when they were left alone together, to give him an unnecessary disadvantage before her. He stood, embarrassed and savage, mid-way between the office and the lighted parlor. "I thought there was nobody here," he said confusedly.

"And there isn't," she answered, smiling up at him as if nothing had happened. Her sweet womanly graciousness, which set him at ease again, seemed subtly to put her out of it, and to give him a vague sense of having gained a mastery of the moment, which he did not see his way to use.

He did not try to use it, and followed her into the parlor, cursing his inadequacy.

"Won't you take the lounge?" she asked, wheeling it lightly towards him.

"No. I must learn to sit up, if I am going Monday."

"Monday?" She could not, or did not, control a slight movement of surprise. He tried in vain to interpret it as one of regret.

"If I can. The sooner the better. You agree with me, I am sure."

"As a person, yes. As a physician, no. It would be safer for you to wait till the next boat. You are hardly ready for the journey. You are living on nerve."

"And shall till I get away from you," said Yorke bluntly.

"Perhaps so," returned the doctor, sighing; "I am of course a little at sea in such a case as this. I wish to facilitate your departure as much and as fast as I can." She stiffened into her professional manner. He felt as if he had struck a glacier in a clover-field.

"I want to talk this out before I go," proceeded Yorke doggedly.

"It only wastes nerve-fibre," said the doctor in an undertone.

"The physiological basis is not the only one on which life is to be taken, Doctor Zay. I have told you before that I am a man as well as a patient. Try to remember it, if you can."

"What is the use in remembering it?" she said unexpectedly. He held his breath for a moment, scrutinizing her averted face.

"Do you mind," he asked suddenly, "my asking whether I am so far too late in the declaration of my feeling for you, that some other man would have a right, or think he had, to—"

"I am not going to marry Dr. Penhallow, if that is what you mean," she interrupted calmly.

"Thank you," said Yorke, after what seemed to her a long silence. He could not keep the rebellious hope out of his pale face. It dashed at her like a sunlit shower.

She looked up, saw it, and shook her head at it, as if it had been a word or outcry.

"It is not impossible, then," persisted he, "that you might some time begin to love me?"

"It is like the miracles," replied the doctor. "It is not logic to assume their impossibility. Their improbability is so great that it amounts to about the same thing. Put aside the thought of my loving you, Mr. Yorke, in justice and in mercy to yourself. I cannot demonstrate to you the futility of your hope. I can only state it. The sooner you accept it, the better for us both. Let us consider this a case of aphonia and aphasia, and be done with it."

"Explain yourself to the ignorant, my learned physician."

"Aphonia is inability to speak."

"Oh, yes; my Greek might have stood me for that. And aphasia is inability to hear?"

"Precisely."

"That is a scientific reply," said Yorke, regarding her keenly. "I am not sure that it is."

—He checked himself. She did not ask him to finish his sentence, but sat with downcast, troubled lids before him.

"Suppose you could love me," he urged, "in the course of time, after a good while; suppose you did not thwart or deny the feeling of kindness which I hope I may say you have for me; suppose you reconsider the reasonableness of the miracle."

"It would make no difference; none at all!" She lifted her head, and her eyes, like sleepless sentinels, forced him off. All his manhood roused itself to defy them. He felt himself swept along by a power as mysterious to him as if he only out of the world had ever come into helpless and beautiful contact with it. All his lot, like a Pagan fate, moved on in its destined way to its appointed end. He experienced the terrible acceleration of a passion, and found that neither nature nor observation had given him any more provision of the force of the torrent than they had power wherewith to stay it.

"I love you," he repeated,—"I love you" as if the fact itself must be an appeal inexorable to her as the laws of light, or gravitation, or any natural code which she could not infringe without penalty.

She made a slight gesture, which seemed one of entreaty rather than of impatience, rose, and walked over to the window, which she flung open. A dash of rain swept through. She stood in the gust for a moment. The light from the globed lamps struggled out against the darkness, and Yorke could see a wet honeysuckle staring in; the yellow flower dripped and nodded at him.

He got up and followed her, halt unconsciously.

"You would not want to give up your profession," he began. "You should not give it up! I would not ask it."

A slow, slight smile curled the delicate corners of her lips.

"You will take cold," she said. She shut the window, and, turning, faced him. Her hair was wet with the rain, and glittered.

"Have you *nothing* for me?" he cried.

"Nothing that you would care for. Men do not value a woman's friendship. They do not understand it. They do not know what to do with it."

"No! I will not have your friendship!" He turned his back to her, and stood, trembling.

"It would be perfectly useless to you, if you would," said Doctor Zay, a little drearily. "You are not well enough to try difficult experiments. Make up your mind to let them all alone,—and me, too."

"I will never let you alone!" said the lover, under his breath.

"Oh yes, you will," said the woman of science quietly. "In a few months you will find it easier to let me alone than to shatter your nervous system over me in this way. Nothing could be worse," she added, "for those spinal symptoms."

"I believe they are right," answered Yorke, with dull bitterness; his imagination at that moment was denuded of hope. "A woman cannot follow a career without ruin to all that is noblest and sweetest and truest in her nature. Your heart is as hard as your lancet. Your instinct has become as cruel. If I had a fair chance it should not be so. I would compel you to feel my presence, to recognize my claim. You should be wounded by a bullet that you could not find,—that slipped, and defied your probe, and rankled till you respected it."

He had made his way back, weakly, as he spoke, to the sofa, upon which he sank, pale and panting.

"The sick are at such horrible odds!" he cried. "It must be bad enough for a woman, but for a man—"

He stopped, startled. She had floated to him with an impetuous motion. He saw her outstretched hands; she leaned above him; her resolute features broke.

"Stop!" she said. "Please stop!"

"What should I stop for?" He held up his arms. She retreated like a dream, and stood towering above him, like a statue. The agitation of her face contrasted singularly with the massiveness of her attitude. He was sure that he saw tears before she dashed them away, as if they had been ignoble impulses.

"Mr. Yorke," she said, in a tone of infinite gentleness, "the time will come when you will bless me for what I am doing now,—for my 'heartlessness,' my 'cruelty,' my 'unwomanliness.' They are three words easy to remember. I shall not forget them—at once. You will retract them some time. You will tell me that perhaps I deserved a—milder phrase. But never mind that! It is a question of what I deserve. It is not a question of what you require. Beyond doubt, that is absolute separation from all this pathological sentiment, and the exciting cause of it. I insist upon this separation. I will not receive any more expressions of your supposed feeling for myself. Go home to your mother and your own people,—to the kind of women you are used to, and understand. As you grow physically stronger, you will rebound to your own environment as naturally as you will walk without crutches. I have been nothing but a crutch to you, Mr. Yorke!"

He raised himself upon the pillows, leaning his head upon his hand and shading his eyes, watching her intently; he did not interrupt her. She went on, in a low, controlled voice:—

"Take it away, and go alone, and you will learn what you would never learn as long as you depended on it. I think you will always remember me gratefully and affectionately. I hope you will. Nothing is more valuable in life to a physician than the fidelity of a patient; it is surprising how little there is of it, after all. They