

The Longest Day of Her Life.

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Illustrated by Cyrus Cuneo.



It was the longest day of her life, and yet it contained very little action; nearly all of it was thought.

It opened with a quarrel between her and her husband.

While brushing her nice dark hair she reproached him for his callous indifference about her young cousin Dick; and he, appearing and disappearing on the threshold of his dressing-room, defended himself sternly.

"Why not?" she said, brushing with accelerated vigour. "You *know* Sir George; you brag of being an old friend. Then why should you refuse to employ your influence?"

"Because I am not fond of asking favours."

"You mean, for other people! You never mind asking favours for yourself."

"You have no right to say that."

"Ah, you don't like the truth." And Ethel brushed her hair with furious energy. "You are to say anything to me, however rude and brutal; but if I—if I venture to——"

"Ethel"—and Jack's tone changed from hardness and weight to a mocking lightness—"you probably don't realize the deteriorating effect of these tantrums. To oblige me, look at your face in the glass."

"I shall see the face of a very unhappy woman—a woman who sometimes wishes she was dead."

"Oh, don't talk such theatrical rubbish!"

Outside the windows there were only pretty things to see—blue sky above the heights of Wimbledon; Coombe Woods sleeping in the July sunshine; a peep of the broad avenue, the gabled roofs, the neat little gardens of what nearly all the residents agreed in thinking a suburban paradise.

And inside the house everything was pretty also. The sunlight, growing brighter every minute, flashed into the spacious upper landing, the square hall, and the well-proportioned lower rooms; it lit up the colours of hearth-rugs, the glaze of blue and white tiles, the lustre of brass grates; it shone upon taste, comfort, even modest

luxury; it showed, altogether, the happy, prosperous state of affairs that caused their neighbours to speak of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Ingram as a couple whose good fortune anybody might envy.

Now the envied couple had come downstairs to breakfast in their pretty dining-room, and, so long as the parlour-maid remained with them, there was a truce to the quarrel.

"Have some omelette, Ethel, or kedgeree?"

"Kedgeree, please."

They *ought* to have been happy. The sunlight seemed so gay and cheerful; their back garden was full of flowers; branches of trees were gently swaying, birds were singing, and through the open casements a gentle air came creeping from the hillside to soften their hearts. And they themselves looked so nice—he a tall, rather handsome man of thirty-five, clean-shaven, strong-featured, with hair brushed back from a respectably broad forehead; and she a dark-haired, blue-eyed, really attractive young woman of twenty-seven.

Directly the parlour-maid withdrew hostilities were resumed.

"So now"—and he snorted contemptuously—"you are going to make it a crime if I refuse to carry your whole family on my shoulders."

"Oh, no, Jack! I have learnt in these five years how very little carrying power your shoulders possess."

It was as though there had been a poison in their blood. They stung themselves and each other; they took a mad pleasure in inflicting pain; their eyes glowed whenever they thought of something peculiarly unkind that could be said next. But with him there was all the time something querulous and pathetic, rather than purely wrathful, a droop of the lip, a tremulousness of the voice, a shakiness of the hand—even when he was putting in his very nastiest strokes.

"I married *you*, not your relations. Heaven knows, I've done enough for them already; but if you choose to make them an unceasing nuisance——"

Then came an outburst from Ethel. He

had done nothing for her family, except slight them, insult them, make of them the ready weapon with which he struck at his wife.

Jack got up from his ruined breakfast and moved about the room. The omelette tasted as if it had been made of election eggs, the milk was sour, the tea bitter, and the toast smelt of dust and ashes.

Throughout the summer there had been

"Exactly what I say. My life has become one long torment. You are always horrid to me—systematically cruel to me, and to all I love; and I can't—I won't—go on with it."

This was like the firing of a big gun, after which it seems futile to use field-pieces and musketry. They stared at each other in silence, Ethel looking pale and rather frightened, Jack looking pale and completely flabbergasted.



"JACK, THIS DECIDES ME. IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT. I'VE TRIED—HEAVEN KNOWS I'VE TRIED; BUT I CAN'T BEAR IT."

so many of these senseless wrangles; but to-day the quarrel intensified, steadily gathered energy, until it culminated with explosive force in Ethel's astounding declaration:—

"Jack, this decides me. It's your own fault. I've tried—Heaven knows I've tried; but I can't bear it. I can't go on living with you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ethel!" After a breathing pause he spoke quietly and seriously, almost apologetically. "You know—you must know—all that you are to me."

"No, I don't. You liked me once, but it's over and done with; otherwise you couldn't treat me so hatefully."

"My dear girl, married life is a matter of give and take. Each partner should make allowances—should understand things."

"I understand too well."

Then he distinctly expressed regret for ever having been harsh or snappish, and he pleaded that the cause of such mistakes was his notoriously bad health.

"Then why don't you consult a doctor?" She did not for a moment believe in his ill-health. It was the excuse that he always made. "Dr. Arnold says you're all right. But if you don't trust his judgment, go and see some London specialist."

"Oh, no," he said, wearily. "Doctors can't help me."

"Not if there's nothing the matter with you."

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed bitterly.

"Thank you, Ethel, for this remarkable display of your sympathy."

Then, after a few moments' hesitation, she proposed that they should go straight to London and obtain the highest medical opinion on his case. She had hesitated because of a somewhat important afternoon engagement, but she decided that the engagement must be cancelled. It seemed now that the thing of paramount importance was to march off her husband as though he were a naughty child, and to watch and hear a famous physician making him look supremely foolish. Yes, she would deprive him at once and for ever of this flimsy excuse for incessant brutality.

His reluctance to undertake a useless and costly excursion merely made her more obstinately determined to carry the point. And at last she carried it.

"Very well," he said, fretfully, and his lips drooped. "I'll go, since you are good enough to say that it will relieve your mind."

"It will, enormously. And now I'll ask Dr. Arnold who's the cleverest man in the whole of London."

Next minute she had put on her burnt-straw hat, swung a gauze scarf round her neck, and was hurrying along the avenue. On either side of the plane trees stood all the little houses, with their little gardens, gabled roofs, and fantastic porches—all so neat and trim, but each perhaps holding its small and compact tragedy of thwarted hope and disappointed love.

Dr. Arnold seemed surprised when she explained her errand. He thought that she need not be anxious. Certainly her husband suffered from nerves and liver, but then who doesn't? However, another opinion could be obtained, and he, Dr. Arnold, would not be huffed. Of course not.

"As you say, it will relieve your mind. Well, then, Mrs. Ingram, I advise you to take him to Dr. Haywarth, No. 261, Welbeck Street. Yes, Haywarth will be the man. And I'll write a letter—for you to give Haywarth. And I'll telegraph, too, to let him know you are coming."

Dr. Arnold wrote the letter and made out his telegraphic message.

"Perhaps you'll kindly send the telegram?"

"Yes, I'm going to the post-office."

"And now may I offer a word of advice on my own account?" Dr. Arnold looked at his charming visitor gravely but very kindly. "Free gratis," and he smiled. "Haywarth will give you a good two guineas' worth, but he doesn't know your husband as well as I do, and he doesn't know you either. You are both highly-strung, nervy people, and what you both ought to avoid is worrying yourselves needlessly. The world is large. Try change of scene and change of air. Run away from worry."

Ethel listened meekly, and understood without resentment that Dr. Arnold had penetrated some of her domestic secrets. It did not matter. He had changed from a doctor into a friend during that period which she always spoke of and thought of as "her great trouble."

At the post-office she sent off the telegram to Dr. Haywarth, and then wrote and sent another one—to a Mr. Cyril Brett:—

"To-day's arrangement unavoidably postponed.—E."

It was a slow train that stopped at nearly every station, and all the way to Waterloo she was thinking.

A neighbour had got into their compartment, and he and Jack were deep in talk about local topics. From time to time she glanced at them, and thought that they were the two most uninteresting men on the face of the broad earth.

Yet one of them was the man that she had loved with all her heart. She thought of those bygone days, when the sight of him thrilled her, when he seemed gloriously handsome as well as appallingly clever, when she knelt by her bedside in her common home and prayed that he might give her his love and make her his wife. She thought of her own pride when the prayer had been granted, of the congratulations of other people, of the rapture in the home circle.

"Fancy!" mamma had said. "Just fancy our E. winning such a prize!"

The fact was that the family considered

Mr. Jack Ingram "a cut above them." He was well-connected, a gentleman at large, with an income that rendered professional labours unnecessary, and, further than this, he was almost what is called "a celebrity." He had written a book, he contributed articles to learned reviews, his photograph had appeared in illustrated newspapers.

But somehow with Jack nothing ever came to anything. He wrote no second book; he just settled down as a muddling sort of literary student, instead of being an active producer, and gradually he adopted the carpingly critical tone of the disappointed man who recognizes his own failure and sneers at everybody else's success. And it was the same story in regard to matters of less moment. His smashes and drives at lawn-tennis used to be awful and overpowering, while now he sent everything into the net; he played a good game at golf, and now his handicap had been put up to eighteen; he had rowed in a college boat, and yet at their last river picnic he caught a crab, and was frankly mocked by that boy, Cyril Brett. He danced beautifully, and now he had grown clumsy in the old dances, and was too lazy to learn the new ones. He used to be full of life and gaiety; now he was dull and prosaic, shunning fun, hating frolic, bringing to every festive gathering a glum face and a silent tongue.

But, worst of all, his bad temper! It was that which had worn out her and her love together. And his pitiful excuses, his harpings on nervous debility, weak digestion, sleeplessness—something unmanlike, contemptible, in such hypochondriacal twaddle!

Then she thought of her great grief, of those two empty rooms—rooms furnished and made ready, but never used. She raised her newspaper to hide her face, because her eyes had filled with tears, as they always did when anything recalled her great grief. Jack had been kind to her before her baby was born, and kind after her baby died. But that was three years ago. She hardened her heart.

He did not value her. He had said that she was witty and amusing, but now he let her see that her poor little efforts after facetiousness bored him. He praised other women, admired their frocks—never hers. He pretended to delight in hearing her sing, but he never wanted to hear her sing now. He had confessed one night that "Good-bye, Summer" gave him a headache. That speech was as monstrous a cruelty as the sitting of a nightingale's throat. She had ceased to sing after that.

He neglected her; he threw her on her own resources. He never asked where she was going when she went out, or where she had been when she came in. Her doings did not interest him.

The train stopped again, and she heard his voice, louder and more insistent, as he talked to their neighbour.

"If you ask me, they've made a hideous *fiasco* of the fifth green." He was speaking with intense earnestness, and his voice became harsh and grating. "I warned them last February. My knowledge and experience had taught me that it is madness to believe any worm-killer can be safely——"

There! He was interested *now*. That was a good example! And she thought of him with bitterness. A dull and incompetent person, fatuously conceited, rigidly self-centred.

The train moved slowly on, and her thoughts took wings, lifted her from the cushioned seat, and flew far away with her. She was thinking of life and of youth, the spell and fascination of moonlit nights, the glamour that hangs over unknown paths that are trodden in darkness, the invincible human craving for new and untried sensations. She thought of that boy—that extremely youthful young man—and of her throb of indignation on the night when he held her in his arms and kissed her lips.

It was the softest, warmest night in June—after the river picnic—and they were crossing a field where hay had been cut; they two together, and the others walking on ahead through the black patches of shadow and the white spaces of moonlight. "Mr. Brett, how dare you! How *dare* you!" In imagination she could hear again the thrilling anger of her whispered words.

Immediately, and still more so during the next few days, she had put the young man back in his proper place. She lectured him severely before she consented to overlook his offence. And he had never offended again. When he called upon her, or when she happened to meet him out walking, they just talked sentiment—vague regret, unformulated repinings—he never going beyond the limits of conjecture as to their fate if only she were free, and she remaining firm in the solid fact that she was *not* free.

No one could say that, if she had been unfaithful in thought, she had been unfaithful in deeds—that is, in big deeds. But how would it all end?

The train had passed Vauxhall without her being aware of its stopping. She glanced at Jack again, and he seemed old—going bald,

all the freshness of youth vanished already, ugly lines about his eyes, a man that no one could fall in love with now. And he would grow older and older, and nothing would ever come to open their lives—no love, no fame, no wealth; they would be perpetual prisoners in their commonplace villa. Because of a marriage ring she was tied to him till death.

As they approached the physician's door a patient came out of it. He was a grey-haired, elderly man, apparently quite a humble person in a suit of working clothes, and he brushed against Ethel's pretty muslin dress as he passed. He was staring straight ahead, not looking to the right or to the left, and something in the expression of his unseeing eyes startled Ethel.

"Jack," she said, with her hand on her husband's arm, "did you see that man's face?"

"No. What about it?"

"It was like the face of a man who has received his death sentence." Then she gave a shiver and laughed. "At any rate, he looked *really* ill."

She could not refrain from that little dig at the person who merely pretended to be ill. This was to be her hour of triumph, and she meant to enjoy it.

But the visit to famous Dr. Haywarth proved disappointing, enervating, fruitless of any immediate results.

He was a solemn, forbidding kind of man, with an odd blending of fussiness and absent-mindedness in his manner when he began to talk to the visitors.

"Yes, yes—just so." And he got up from the table at which he had been writing. "Good day to you, Mr. Ingram—and Mrs. Ingram. I have read the letter which you kindly sent in to me—from, ah, Dr. Arnold. Yes, yes—I am quite ready," and he hastily arranged the papers on his blotting-pad. "And now, if you please, Mrs. Ingram, I will see your husband alone."

"Oh, but I should like to stay and hear your verdict."

"You shall come in afterwards. Yes, yes—that will be better."

The butler was standing at the open door of the consulting-room, and Ethel felt constrained to allow herself to be ushered back to the waiting-room.

This was not what she had bargained for. The best part of her treat was spoiled already. She wanted to listen to the physician's very own words and watch Jack's discomfiture as he, too, listened to them. Now it would

be easy for Jack to recover his self-possession. He would have time to pull himself together.

She glanced at the ugly black clock on the draped mantel-shelf, opened and shut two or three preposterous books on the big table, then sat on a chair near a window and drummed irritably with a high-heeled shoe. The vast, dull, depressing room was empty, so she could make herself quite at home.

Presently her heels became motionless. She was thinking again.

What would be the end of all the note-writing, appointment-making, and sentiment-talking with Cyril? Repressed tears moistened her eyelids. She was too lonely; her life was unbearable. She could not go on with it for ever. If not this one, then someone else eventually. Nothing to hold her in restraint—no child, no truly unbreakable tie. Sooner or later she might do what so many have done—go away to disgrace with a lover, or stay at home in infamy until discovered.

But if she were free! Suppose this doctor has found something wrong. Suppose he is even now saying words that promise emancipation. Unbidden, swift mental pictures came thronging—the sick bed, the widow's dress, the whole pageant of woe—freedom.

She shivered, and turned from the window to look at the clock. Surely they were being a long time about it in the other room!

She moved to the table, sat down there, and, taking up one of the books, observed that her hand was trembling. She looked at the clock nervously. How long had Jack been closeted with the doctor? It seemed an incredible time.

And as the heavy minutes dragged by she became more and more nervous. Oh, there *must* be something wrong! When the butler came to tell her that she might return to the other room, he found her pacing to and fro in an agitated manner.

"Well," she asked, anxiously, almost breathlessly, "what is it? Please tell me everything—don't keep me in suspense."

Jack was looking much as usual, not particularly foolish, as he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for the two sovereigns and the two shillings. Dr. Haywarth was seated at his desk, and it seemed to her when he turned that his face was preternaturally grave.

"Excuse me," he said, fussily. "I am writing a letter to—ah—Dr. Arnold—with a note." And he went on writing. "Yes, yes—if you'll allow me—I'll finish my letter, and then perhaps Mr. Ingram will take it back with him, and deliver it."

But Ethel could not contain herself. She asked eager questions, until Dr. Haywarth, turning with a flustered air, begged her not to interrupt him. Then at last he accomplished his task, hurriedly picked up and folded pieces of paper, put them in an envelope, and rose from the desk.

"Well?" said Ethel again.

"Here we are, then," said Dr. Haywarth.

exchange for the sovereigns and shillings, shook hands, bowed.

Outside in the street Ethel took her husband's arm and pressed it.

"Now, what did he say?"

"Well, really very little, Ethel."

"But tell me—whatever it was."

"Oh, well—I was to take care of myself. It amounted to that—as I understood it.



"'WELL,' SHE ASKED, ANXIOUSLY, ALMOST BREATHLESSLY, 'WHAT IS IT? PLEASE TELL ME EVERYTHING—DON'T KEEP ME IN SUSPENSE.'"

"This is for our good friend Arnold, and he will convey my ideas as to treatment and so forth. And now—the fact is, I am due at the hospital. You will, I am sure, excuse me."

He gave the letter to Jack Ingram in

But I'll tell you all about it later on—this evening."

"This evening! What do you mean? You are not going to leave me now?"

Truly, however, it was what Jack meant to do. He explained more or less apologetically.

cally that, having wasted half the day, he would use the rest of it for business.

"Business! What business?"

"There are one or two things I could tackle now that I'm up here."

"Very well," said Ethel, quietly and coldly.

"And, as you are going back, you might take this precious letter, and hand it over to Arnold."

"Oh, certainly."

"Then good-bye, dear. I'll be home to dinner without fail."

She walked away, down Welbeck Street and into Wigmore Street, swelling with indignation. Jack must have plainly seen her anxiety, her affectionate concern, and yet he had deserted her—had just cast her adrift, to calm down unassisted as best she could. That was *like* Jack.

Regard for him had brought her to London, but he could not even escort her to Waterloo—could not even remember that it was nearly one o'clock, and that gongs all over the universe were announcing the midday meal. He, of course, would lunch at his sumptuous club, and she thought of him established there, eating, drinking, chattering. Perhaps, she thought, bitterly, he would find another delightful companion with whom he could go on talking about worm-killers.

She herself lunched at the restaurant of the illustrious drapers in Wigmore Street, and then dispatched a telegram—to Mr. Cyril Brett:—

"You may come and see me any time after three.—E."

She caught a good train from Waterloo, but, fast as it went, her thoughts travelled more rapidly. They flashed far into the past and far into the future. Then gradually they came back to the present, remained with her in the compartment, settled themselves on the envelope that she was holding in her ungloved hand.

She knew that inside the envelope there lay a statement of the plain, indisputable fact that Jack had nothing the matter with him. Her strange dread—that baseless anxiety which for a few moments she generously entertained—had long since gone. This evening Jack would be forced to confess that Dr. Haywarth had found nothing wrong, although he would endeavour to gloze it over and persuade her, if he could, that a verdict had been given in his favour. He would swear that this fussily arrogant physician had diagnosed a state of nerves that might justify any amount of ill-temper. And perhaps Dr. Arnold would back him up.

But why should she wait until the evening to hear what either of them said, or to know the contents of this envelope? The letter concerned her just as much as Jack—a thousand, a million times more, because perhaps the conduct of her whole future life depended on it.

Suddenly a sense of her sufferings, an angry revolt against the manner in which she had been ignored, trampled on, both by Jack and Dr. Haywarth, moved her to decisive action. She boldly tore open the envelope.

"Dear Dr. Arnold,—Many thanks for your note *in re* Mr. Ingram. I have gone into his case carefully, and I embody my views and suggestions in the enclosed memorandum."

That was the letter—just polite flummery. Now for the memorandum. The real verdict would be in this.

The wind blew in upon her flushed face, blowing her little forehead curls against the brim of her hat, making the gauze scarf fly out and flap noisily, as she looked at Dr. Haywarth's medical jargon. Just a half-sheet of note-paper, with the big words underlined, and the rest hastily, carelessly scribbled—not much for two guineas!

"*Advanced aortic stenosis.* Dilatation of the heart. Failing compensation.

"*Prognosis.* Unfavourable. A sudden ending may be expected. At best, a few months only can be allowed.

"*Treatment.*—Absolute rest. Removal from his present unsatisfactory surroundings, which appear detrimental to his comfort."

The wind blew in upon her livid cheeks, retracted lips, and chattering teeth. She had grasped the full meaning of the verdict. It was a death sentence.

She did not observe how the porters shouted at her when she nearly fell in getting out of the train before it came to rest at the platform, how the collector followed her a little way because she had not given up her ticket, or how two neighbours and a butcher's boy stared as she ran along the avenue.

Now she was at Dr. Arnold's door, banging on it with one hand while she rang his bell with the other.

"I want Dr. Arnold," she cried, breathlessly. "I must speak to him without an instant's delay."

But the doctor's maidservant could not comply with this excited demand. Dr. Arnold had received an urgent summons and gone off in his motor-car to see one of his patients, who had been taken ill at the

seaside. He would not be back till quite late.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?"

"Will you leave any message, ma'am?" And the servant offered Mrs. Ingram a paper-block and a pencil.

"No. Take me into his room, and let me write to him."

"Yes. Step this way, ma'am."

"Thank you. Leave me alone now."

Ethel wrote a frantic, disconnected letter and tore it up; tried again, and destroyed the second attempt, then burst into tears. Nearly an hour had passed, and a considerable inroad had been made upon Dr. Arnold's stock of stationery, before she completed her communication and packed it up in a large envelope with Dr. Haywarth's letter and memorandum.

"Yes, ma'am," said the maid, "I'll give it to him directly he returns."

"Thank you," said Ethel, with a catch in her voice.

She had implored Dr. Arnold to keep the appalling truth from Jack. She was ignorant as to medical etiquette or ethics, but she supplicated the doctor, for friendship's sake, to save her husband from a clear comprehension of his impending doom.

With bowed head and leaden footsteps she walked slowly home. The sun was shining on the red gables, on the roses in the front garden, on the copper tablet that decorated the garden gate with a silly name. *Baveno!* The name was the only stupid thing about their dear, dear little home. A builder's name. No fault of Jack's; he hated it as much as she did. She pushed the gate, and gave a little sob. *Baveno!*

"No, nothing, thank you."

She was trying to hide her face from the parlour-maid. Lizzie must not see that she had been crying. She crawled upstairs to her bedroom, locked the door, sat down in a chintz-covered arm-chair, and the dead weight of the catastrophe descended upon her.

She felt all cold and numb, making jerky sobs that sounded like hiccoughs, and with teeth that chattered at intervals. It was the horror of the thing taking possession of her. Doom! A few months only! Oh, he must not know—he should not know. But she must be brave and do her duty. And she thought of how she would guard him and watch over him during the remnant of his days. There might be other nurses, but no nurse could do for him what she would do. No, they should not take him from her.

Suddenly she grew hot, felt as if she was being stifled. A wave of shame had come sweeping through her brain. She thought of the physician's merciless words. "Removal from unsatisfactory surroundings, which are detrimental to his comfort."

Then, with a stab of anguish, she recognized that the words were true. A nagging wife—can such a companion seem otherwise than detrimental to the comfort of a dying man? A creature of moods and whims, who habitually thinks only of her own selfish pleasures, who bursts into shrewish protest if thwarted or controlled—can she persuade any stranger that she will in an hour change her whole character, transform herself into the calm saint who sits by sick beds and makes rough pillows smooth with one touch of a gentle hand?

The trained physician had infallibly read the secret of her restless, irritating ways. A single glance of those penetrating eyes had been sufficient. He had classed her among intrinsically worthless women. Jack had not betrayed her. He was too loyal to do that.

"Yes, what is it?"

Lizzie, the parlour-maid, was tapping at the bedroom door.

"Mr. Brett, ma'am, downstairs in the drawing-room."

"Send him away," said Ethel, loudly, almost fiercely. "Send him away. I can't see him. I can't see anybody."

She had forgotten his very existence. She moved across to a window, stood there, hidden behind the curtain, and presently she heard his voice down below among the roses.

"Really—are you sure about it?" And he chuckled idiotically. "Not a mistake, eh?"

"No, sir. The mistress—well, she isn't quite herself."

Ethel, watching furtively, saw him tap the Baveno tablet with his cane, and then slouch through the gate. A pink-faced lout in white flannels—something that had once seemed charming because it stimulated one's vain imagination; something that had become odious to the sight because it symbolized all one's treacherous folly. He disappeared, and at once was again forgotten.

She was thinking of that characteristic droop at the corners of Jack's mouth, of the fretful note in his voice, the questioning quaver which sounded like the lamentation of a sick child, of the golf weakness, the tennis faults, the river crabs that she had attributed to sheer clumsiness or laziness—little failures sad enough anyhow, but

poignantly, maddeningly pathetic when one understood their real cause.

Near at hand flowers glowed vividly. At a distance the Coombe Woods spread out their beauty in the afternoon sunlight; the whole world seemed so beautiful. Oh, to be snatched away from it—to turn cold, deaf, blind—to pass with one fluttered breath into eternal darkness! Pity for him—melting yet burning pity—filled her heart.

She sank upon the floor, sobbed and writhed. These thoughts were insupportable. It seemed to her as if she herself would bear the guilt of all that was going to happen—as if by her impious attempts to forecast the future she had aroused the slumbering wrath of Destiny—as if in those cruel musings when she dared to imagine the possibility of widowhood and freedom she had released vast implacable forces of Nature—the dark powers of unending wickedness that prowl invisible, ever watching and waiting for a chance to pounce and strike.

“Ma’am—if you please, ma’am, I’ve brought you up some tea.”

It was Lizzie tapping at the door again, talking through the door about nice hot cups of tea, saying she would put the tray on a chair outside the door.

“Go away,” gasped Ethel. “Leave me alone. Go away.”

She lay face downwards, sprawling, clutching, gurgling. Her shoulders moved unceasingly. Pity, horror, and remorse were shaking her to pieces.

When at last she gathered herself together she knelt and prayed for a little while before rising to her feet.

She must wash away the traces of tears. She must hide every sign of distress, speak in ordinarily calm tones, appear quite natural and untroubled. The looking-glass showed reddened circles round her eyes and a puffy, swollen nose. All this must be set right before Jack got home, or he might begin to question, doubt, and guess.

She was calmer now, walking about the house, standing first in one and then in the other of the two empty rooms, coming downstairs, looking at things here and there on the ground floor, and thinking all the time.

They had chosen that sofa at the shop in the Tottenham Court Road; the Sheraton bureau—her own private desk and writing place—he had bought at Bath; they picked up those two vases at Lucerne during their honeymoon. This Japanese lantern was a fancy of hers—an expensive fancy. It had

been good of him to gratify her craving for the lantern—especially good, when one considered that he never cared for Oriental art.

She went to her desk, sat down, and automatically opened drawers, pulled out old letters, untied strings, and scattered neatly arranged packets. She must do something to occupy herself—to prevent herself from thinking. Two hours more, at least, before she could expect to see him.

The back garden was losing all its gay colours; the house had thrown its shadow half-way across the lawn, and in the pearl-grey depths beneath motionless branches the flower-borders looked faint and dim. Inside and outside the house a strange stillness had fallen—disturbed only by the murmur of insects and the ticking of the hall-clock. As she listened to the dull beat of the clock she heard her heart beating tumultuously.

Fear again—fear of the unknown, of immensity, of eternity.

“Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.” That was the Burial Service. It had come to her as the echo of words that she would have sworn she had forgotten—words spoken at her father’s grave, heard then and never since—words that sink into the ear like drops of ice.

She raised her hands and pressed the sides of her forehead. She must be calm for his sake. No more emotion, and, above all, no more of this craven fear.

She began to read old letters, cherished and stored because they came from members of the family. She had suffered so grievously by reason of the loss of their writers’ society, separation from mother, sisters, brothers, had caused so much pain, that she never had felt able to destroy the slightest scrawl that issued from the old home circle. Received two days ago, last year, at any time since her marriage, these letters, as they tumbled from their strings and confusedly piled themselves on the desk, seemed to symbolize her life itself, now of a sudden disarranged, overturned, smashed into chaos.

“Please thank Jack for the golf-clubs.” That was a letter from Tom ages and ages ago. “He has supplied me, apparently, with a whole set; and if he happens to have a bag to hold them, I shall be all there.”

“The hamper arrived safely.” This was a line or two from Sybil. “It is awfully decent of you and Jack to come to the rescue.”

“Tell Jack that both suits fit Charles admirably.” A long missive from mother. “It is very good of him to send the boots, too. I never *dreamed* that he would go out

and buy a *new* pair. I only meant some old shoes that were not fine enough for his High-and-Mightiness. Pray thank him."

How good he had been to her people—really and truly! Grumbling a little now and then, but always responding generously to the covert or open appeal for assistance. These letters were full of acknowledgments. Yes, and how had they thanked him for such unflinching kindness? Nearly always grudgingly, often with a sneer. "His High-and-Mightiness!" That was an impertinence, even from mother to daughter. She tore up the long-treasured paper and tossed its fragments to the floor.

But soon she felt once more the stabbing twinges that are caused by personal regret. Phrases of sympathy, encouragement, advice met her eyes again and again throughout the letters from mamma.

"Sorry to hear Jack is as selfish as ever. I should like to give Jack a piece of my mind. I think you take things too easily. If we women don't assert ourselves, we quickly get pushed to the wall." And so on.

Mother and the rest of them had never understood him. They were incapable of doing so. He was too refined, too highly polished and cultivated, to be comprehensible to such intelligences as theirs. And she thought, sadly and wearily, that it is no use refusing to recognize hard facts. Her people were common—as common, really, if measured by lofty standards, as the people who live in slums, who squabble at table, insult and forgive one another every minute, who run along the dirty roads when they hear a policeman's whistle, and dance on the pavement when a piano-organ stops the way.

Poor dears! Not their fault! But it might have been better for her if, as a bride, she could have got right away from them. She might have been happier now if she had put them at a distance of a few hundred miles then. It is a fatal mistake to have your family so near that they can intermeddle in the most sacred things of your married life.

It had been mean of her, as undignified as it was treacherous, to speak to them of Jack's failings. How *could* she have borne to accept, without protest, such expressions of pity as she had just read? Too many of them to tear up. It would take too long to destroy all this evidence of her unworthiness. She put the letters back in the drawers, stuffed them in forcibly and scornfully, and sat with folded hands.

The shadows in the garden were lengthening, deepening; and in her thoughts grey depths

had opened. Mother and sisters and brothers shrank smaller and smaller, became nothing, were gone. She thought and thought only of the man to whom she had bound herself, the lover who for a while had held the keys of heaven, the father of her child.

Thought and emotion blended now. The feelings as they arose in her breast *were* thoughts. She was feeling what she had felt in the five days of life that had been granted to their child—a yearning desire to protect the weak and helpless thing that she loved, to die if by her death it might live, to die for its sake a thousand times. And she would have died now to save her husband from the grip of doom.

Nothing mattered. His anger, his querulousness, his silences, and his frowns were a part of himself. It was him that she wanted—not novelty, passionate, untried joy, or freedom with anyone else; *him*, and no other—her own man-mate.

She went to the railway-station to meet him, just as she used to do years before when Baveno was still a delightful toy to which he came hurrying back each time that he was forced to leave it for a few hours.

She saw him at once, moving towards her through the crowd of meaningless figures, looking pale and sad, looking like the ghost of her happy past.

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

She had taken his arm, and was pressing it against her side as they went down the covered slope to the avenue.

"Let's walk slowly," she murmured. "I am sure you are tired."

"Yes," he said, "I am rather tired. I've had a tiring day. I'll tell you about it when I've changed my clothes."

"Oh, don't dress for dinner. Don't—don't fatigue yourself unnecessarily."

But he would dress—he always would; and to-night when he came down to her in the drawing-room she was thinking that this undeviating habit was but another of his many merits. How wives must suffer when husbands are careless in such matters, not loving soap and water, feeling as comfortable in flannels or serge as in clean white shirts and silk-lined jackets!

"There," he said, cheerfully and bravely; "now for a piece of good news." And he explained that he had been all over London, to Hampstead and to Norwood, hunting that great Sir George, and at last securing his interest on behalf of Cousin Dick. "Sir George didn't absolutely promise; Ethel, but

I know he'll throw his weight into our scale, and, honestly, I believe that Dick will get the job."

"Oh, Jack, what—what can I say?"

The thought of his goodness overwhelmed her. In all these long hours he had been toiling to give her pleasure.

"Nonsense. I was glad to take advantage of being on the spot, don't you know. When you spoke of it this morning—well, I just shirked the effort. That was all."

The effort! She trembled and drew in her breath. "Treatment: Absolute rest." Rushing here and there about the huge town, he might have dropped dead at any moment.

"Dinner is ready," said Lizzie, the parlour-maid.

They sat opposite to each other at the little round table exactly as they had sat night after night, and twice, when Lizzie's back was turned, she stretched her hand across to him and clasped his hand. When he praised the curried chicken she nearly broke down. But she must be brave. She ate of the curry, and it almost choked her.

Then after dinner they sat together in the drawing-room, he in the deep arm-chair, she on the sofa, and it was all exactly like last night or the night before. He did not talk while he smoked his first two cigarettes; he never did. After the second cigarette it was his custom to light a pipe and open a book.

But to-night he did not do this. He came to her, put his hand on her shoulder, and looked down at her with a wonderful expression in his eyes.

"Ethel, my dear, I've been making resolutions—plans for the future."

Ethel lowered her head, rapidly brought out a handkerchief, and blew her nose.

"You have been a good wife to me."

Her heart almost stopped beating. Did he know the truth?

"Yes, my pretty Ethel. It touched me when you spoke to Dr. Haywarth so anxiously. You would have cared—you would have really cared. But Haywarth was quite reassuring."

He did not know. She breathed again.

"Haywarth says it is all my stupid nerves, and I am to diet myself. And, Ethel, I have made a vow to obey him." And gently patting her shoulder he quoted "Maud": "Shall I not take care of all that I think, yea, even of wretched meat and drink, if I be dear to someone else, if I be dear—"

"Jack, please don't go on."

"Very well. Only this. I made another vow. Ethel, Heaven help me, I'll be a better

husband to you in the years to come. Now don't be a silly girl. My darling, don't cry."

They sat side by side on the sofa, and the electric light shone upon all their pretty furniture, pictures, and knick-knacks, and it was as if every moment invisible bands were binding her more tightly to him.

The evening wore on, and it seemed to her that this lamp-lit room was the one small shelter and refuge from the prowling powers of darkness. Unseen, but very near, drawing ever nearer, Death and Destiny were advancing towards their prey. She held her husband's hand in both of hers, and horror, grief, and love struggled for supremacy.

"I say, Ethel!" He had released his hand and was stretching himself. "I nearly dropped asleep. Sing something to me. You've been neglecting your music, haven't you?"

She had torn out the handkerchief, and she spoke from behind it.

"I'll sing—if you wish it. But aren't you too tired? Won't it make your head ache?"

"No—please sing."

She seated herself at the piano, played a few bars, and began to sing.

"Good-bye, summer. Good-bye, goo—
Goo— Goo—"

She had broken down completely. Bursting into hysterical tears, she came back to the sofa, flopped upon her knees, and flung her arms round him.

"Jack, my own Jack!" She was clinging and gasping and sobbing. "I—I can't bear it. Oh, I can't bear it. I shall go mad. Oh, stay with me—"

Then the drawing-room door opened. It was Lizzie, meaning to announce Dr. Arnold, but being pushed aside by the visitor in his hurry to enter.

"Mrs. Ingram, be calm. There is nothing to worry about. On my honour, it's all right. Ingram, may I speak to your wife by herself?"

She leaned her back against the bookcase in the study, and clung to a chair for further support, while Dr. Arnold explained the nature of the little mistake.

Dr. Haywarth, of Welbeck Street, had been telegraphing and telephoning, and finally had sent a special messenger to convey the right paper and recall the wrong one.

"Mrs. Ingram, do you understand? Nothing whatever to do with your husband—that paper which alarmed you so. No, it was a rough jotting for his case-book—not your husband's case at all—quite another patient, someone he had been seeing just before your



"IT WAS LIZZIE, MEANING TO ANNOUNCE DR. ARNOLD, BUT BEING PUSHED ASIDE BY THE VISITOR IN HIS HURRY TO ENTER."

husband arrived. Haywarth is extremely sorry, but he inadvertently put this in with his letter to me, instead of the directions about your husband's diet. See now, this is the genuine article. 'Milk puddings; moderate use of tobacco.' There, you are feeling better. Smell these salts. Now let me take you back to Ingram."

But Ethel stopped the doctor outside the drawing-room door.

"Dr. Arnold, don't come in now. Come and see him to-morrow. Do you mind? I want to be alone with him."

And so that day love was born again in Baveno. And the love will last, because another child is to be given to them. A little creature with tentacles like starfish, groping and clutching—such infinitely fragile hands, yet strong enough to hold this man and this woman together till death does them part.