

Mistress of Shenstone

(An Edwardian Romance)

Chapter 1

Three o'clock on a dank afternoon, early in November. The wintry sunshine in fitful gleams pierced the greyness of the leaden sky.

The great trees in Shenstone Park stood gaunt and bare, spreading wide arms over the sodden grass. All nature seemed waiting the first fall of winter's snow, which should hide its deadness and decay under a lovely pall of sparkling white, beneath which a promise of fresh life to come might gently move and stir and eventually spring forth.

The Mistress of Shenstone moved slowly up and down the terrace, wrapped in her long fur cloak, listening to the soft drip, drip of autumn all around; noting the silent fall of the last dead leaves; the steely grey of the lake beyond; the empty flower garden and the deserted lawn.

The large, stone house had a desolate appearance, most of the rooms being closed. Only in one or two were log fires blazing, casting a cheerful ruddy glow on the window panes. A tiny, white poodle walked the terrace with his mistress - an agitated bundle of white curls; sometimes running round her or dropping behind only to rush on in unexpected haste almost tripping her up as she turned.

'Peter,' said Lady Ingleby. 'Please behave in a more rational manner! Either come to heel and follow properly and sedately, as a dog of your age should, or trot on in front, and for goodness sake don't be so fidgety. You are perfectly all right when Michael takes you out. I'll have to call for William to take you in! Whatever would Michael think?'

The little animal looked up at her pathetically through his tumbled curls, a soft silky mass. His eyes, red-rimmed from the cold, had that unseeing look often noticed in an old dog. Yet there was in them, and in the whole pose of his tiny body, an anguish of anxiety which could not have escaped a genuine dog-lover. Even Lady Ingleby became partially aware of it. She stooped and patted his head. 'Poor little Peter,' she said, more kindly, 'It's horrible for both of us having Michael so far away in this stupid war. But he will come home before long and we will both forget all the anxiety and loneliness. It will be spring and Michael will have you properly clipped. And we will go to Brighton again and you can trot about thinking you are as big as a lion in Trafalgar Square.

I can't imagine why a great big man like Michael is so devoted to such a tiny scrap of a dog. Now if you were a Great Dane - - - however, Michael loves us both and we both love Michael, so we must be nice to each other while he's away.'

Myra Ingleby smiled, drew the folds of her cloak more closely around her and walked on. A small white shadow, with no wag to its tail, moved dejectedly behind.

And the dead leaves, loosing their hold on the sapless branches, fluttered to the sodden earth.

The door of the lower hall opened and a footman holding a telegram came quickly out. His features were set, well-trained and immobile but his eyelids, flickered nervously as he handed the silver salver to his mistress. Lady Ingleby's lovely face paled to absolute whiteness beneath her large hat; but she took up the orange envelope with a steady hand, opening it with fingers which did not tremble.

As she glanced at the signature the colour came back into her cheeks, 'from Dr. Brand,' she said in high good humour and Lady Ingleby went into the house.

But outside the dead leaves turned slowly and rustled on the grass. said, with an involuntary exclamation of relief. She read the telegram while the waiting footman nodded furtively toward the house. A maid at the window ran to tell the anxious household all was well.

'Visiting patient in your area,' she read, 'Can you put me up for the night?
Arriving 4.30' Deryck Brand.

'William.' said Lady Ingleby to her footman, 'tell Mrs. Jarvis that Sir Deryck Brand is calling in the neighbourhood and will stay the night. A fire can be lit at once in the magnolia room for him. He'll be here in an hour so the car can go to the station. Tell Groatley we will have tea in the sitting room as soon as Sir Deryck arrives. And please, send down to the Lodge to Mrs. O'Mara that I will be wanting her up here this evening. Oh, and, by the way, tell Mrs. O'Mara that there is no further news from abroad, she'll be worried.'

'Yes, m'lady,' said the footman and Myra smiled at the reflection of her own immense relief in his voice.

He turned and went quickly into the house with Peter barking furiously at his heels. Lady Ingleby moved to the front of the terrace and stood beside the stone lions close to an empty vase which in summer had been a brilliant mass of scarlet geraniums. Her face was glad with expectation. 'Somebody to talk to at last!' she said. 'I began to think I would have to take my courage and go to Mother in town. And Sir Deryck of all people. How lovely of him to give me the whole evening. If people knew they would be so jealous. Peter, you little fiend, come here. Why they don't kick you out when you bark at them like that, I will never know. You pretend to be too ill to eat your dinner then behave like that - poor William.'

Their dying year was almost at an end and nature waited for her pall of snow.

Chapter 2

'It's wonderful to have someone to talk to at last, and you of all people, dear doctor! All the world knows how precious your time is. Can your patients really wait until the morning?'

Lady Ingleby poured the tea and handed it to him.

Deryck Brand placed the cup carefully down on the tea table, helped himself to thin bread and butter and smiled his most charming smile.

'Mine would be a very dismal profession, dear lady, if it stopped me having a meal or pleasant conversation with a perfectly healthy person. I find the surest way to live life to the full, accomplishing the maximum amount of work with the minimum amount of strain is to cultivate the habit of living in the present; giving your whole mind to the person or subject of the moment. So we will forget all the patients and enjoy ourselves to the full.'

The burden of a great loneliness seemed to lift itself from Myra's heart. She looked at her visitor.

His forty-two years sat lightly on him in spite of the streaks of silver in the dark hair. There was a youthful alertness about his tall athletic figure but the lean brown face held a look of quiet strength and power, mingled with a keen alertness and ready comprehension. It inspired trust and drew forth confidence.

'Do you always put salt on your bread and butter?' she said. 'How glad I am to be the person of the moment. I could easily forget I am talking to the great nerve specialist of the day. I must concentrate on realising the same pleasure and also that I am entertaining a good friend of Michael's. Otherwise I should be tempted to consult you professionally. Only I really believe Sir Deryck, for the first time in my life . . . I'm becoming neurotic.' The doctor did not need to look at his hostess. His practised eye had already noted the thin cheeks, the haunted look, the purple shadows beneath the lovely grey eyes. He leaned forward and looked into the fire.

'If that is really the case, the fact that you are aware of it is very good and the condition can't be serious. But I want you to remember, Lady Ingleby, that I count all my patients as friends and they have a liberty to consult me at any time. Also, my friends can immediately become my patients at any time. So - - - consult me, if I can be of any help.'

The doctor helped himself to more bread and butter and Myra was grateful he didn't seem to notice the rush of tears to her eyes. She busied herself with the teapot and then said with a slightly tremulous laugh, 'Oh, thank you, I will then, in a minute. Meanwhile, what do you think of the decorations? Michael made all these alterations before he went away. The new electric lights are a patent arrangement of his own. And have you seen his portrait? It's a wonderful likeness, isn't it?'

Myra didn't seem able to stop. The doctor looked around him appreciatively. 'I've been admiring the room ever since I came in,' he said, 'it's charming.'

Then he raised his eyes to the picture over the mantelpiece. It was a life-size portrait of a tall, bearded man with the high brow of the scholar and thinker and the eyes of a mystic. It had the gentle, unruffled expression of a saint. He appeared old enough to be the father of the woman in whose sitting-room the portrait was the central object. The artist had painted him in an old Norfolk hunting jacket with a riding crop, seated in the garden beside a rustic table. Everything in the picture was homely, old and comfortable with russet-brown the predominant colour. The creases in the suit were old friends and the tobacco pouch was ancient and stained.

The highest light in the painting was the clear blue of those dreamy eyes. They were bent on the table, where sat, in an expectant attitude of adoring attention, a white toy-poodle. The devotion between the man and the dog was very evident. It was almost palpable. The concentrated affection with which they looked at each other was very cleverly depicted.

It left an impression of a friendship in which there had been no room for a third. The doctor glanced for an instant at the lovely woman seated regally behind the tea table. 'Where did *she* come in?' Then he turned to the large armchair on his right where a small dejected mass of white curls lay in a huddled heap. It was impossible to distinguish between head and tail.

'Is this the little dog?' The doctor spoke slowly. 'Yes, this is Peter. But in the picture he is smart and properly clipped Peter and Michael are devoted to each other but I'm not really fond of small dogs and actually I think Peter is very spoiled. Also, I feel he only tolerates me because I am Peter's wife and only stays because, where I am, Peter will eventually return. I'm quite kind to him but really he is too old. I'm not sure he ought not to be - er, put down. But Michael always speaks as though he is too good to live. Personally, I think it is high time he went where all good dogs go. I can't imagine what is wrong with him now. He has refused all his food since yesterday. He has been so restless and fidgety. He usually sleeps on Michael's bed and I close the door and hear no more of him until he barks in the morning and is taken downstairs but last night he whined for hours. Eventually I wrapped him in Michael's old shooting jacket, the one in the picture and he seemed content at last. But today he still refuses to eat. I believe he has some sort of complaint that elderly dogs get, don't you think so? It would be far kinder to give him some sort of effective poison, or something.'

'Oh, hush!' said the doctor. 'Peter may not be sleeping.' Lady Ingleby laughed. 'My anxious little eyes, gazing with an agony of question into the kind and keen eyes of the man. 'The first wag I have seen in twenty-four hours,' remarked Lady Ingleby but neither Peter nor Deryck Brand took any notice.

Without moving, the doctor spoke. 'Yes, little Peter,' he said. Peter's small tail ceased thumping. He sat very still for a moment then quietly moved back into the middle of the chair, turned round three or four times then lay down dropping his head between his paws like a little child that has sobbed itself to sleep.

The doctor turned and looked at Myra. 'What does all that mean,' she said in astonishment. dear Sir Deryck! Do you suppose that animals understand what we are saying?'

'Indeed, I do,' replied the doctor. 'And more than that, they don't usually need language. They are telepathic. They read our thoughts. A nervous rider can terrify a horse. Dumb creatures will turn away from those who think of them with dislike, whereas, a real lover of animals can win them without a word. Also, if we take the trouble, we can arrive at their ideas in the same way.'

'Good heavens,' exclaimed Myra. 'Well, I wish you could thought read what is wrong with little Peter. I won't know how to face Michael if there is anything wrong with his beloved dog.'

The doctor lay back and crossed his legs resting his elbows on the arms of the chair, then he let his fingertips meet exactly. It was the same attitude in which he usually sat when he was concentrating on a patient. Presently he turned and looked steadily at the little white heap curled up on the big armchair. The room was very still. 'Peter,' said the doctor, suddenly. Peter sat up at once and peeped at Sir Deryck through his curls.

'Poor little Peter,' said the doctor, kindly. Peter moved to the edge of the chair, sat very upright and looked eagerly across. Then he wagged his tail, tapping the chair with anxious, little taps. Then he wagged his tail, slower and slower but never taking his 'Little Peter asked a question,' replied Sir Deryck, gravely, 'and I answered it.' 'Oh, that's wonderful. Will you talk this over with Michael when he comes back? This would really interest him.' The doctor looked into the fire.

'It's a big subject,' he said. 'One day, when I have time, I am going to write about all the animals mentioned in the Bible and how they immediately obeyed God's commands. There was a lion, for instance, who was told to slay a disobedient man of God but nothing more. It's natural instinct would be to maul the body and also to cause the ass to flee in terror. But there the lion and the ass stayed until the old prophet came to fetch the body away. God should be paramount over our strongest instincts, don't you think?'

Myra took some time to speak. When she did it was in a troubled voice. 'I feel, at the moment, any spiritual life I may have is at a very low ebb. But look how peacefully little Peter is sleeping. You have evidently set his mind at rest.' Myra paused, hesitatingly. 'May I - - - may I now, become your patient?'

Chapter 3

The doctor moved his chair to gaze at the portrait. The curtains were closely drawn and the dank drip of autumn had no place in the warm luxury. 'Do you like the portrait?' Myra asked. The doctor glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to six. 'Garth Dalmain painted it, didn't he? He is quite a genius.' 'Yes,' she said, 'It was just before he lost his sight.'

'Well, I hardly know Lord Ingleby well enough to give you an opinion, but the more you look at Dalmain's portraits, the more you get to know the person' The doctor continued after a moment, more gently. 'Now, tell me, why did you leave town and all your friends there? Surely waiting for news from the War Office would have been easier there.'

Lady Ingleby laughed mirthlessly.

'I came away partly to escape from my mother. You don't know her but with Michael away I am absolutely defenceless. She swoops down, takes control of everything and reduces everyone in the house to hysteria. She bullies me. She will come down here eventually, I am afraid.'

The doctor's face was grave. It hurt him to hear criticism of a mother to outsiders; yet he knew the facts which were common knowledge and how little cause the sweet, loveable woman at his side had to consider the tie between mother and daughter a sacred one. He had come to help, not to find fault. Also the minute hand was hastening towards the hour.

The final instructions of the kind-hearted old Duchess of Meldrum, as she parted from him at the War Office, had been, 'Remember, six o'clock from London. I shall insist on the telegram being kept back until then. I shall ring Buckingham Palace, if necessary, as these good people here know! So it gives you ample time.'

'I think I understand, Lady Ingleby,' said the doctor, 'although it doesn't come within my own experience. But, tell me, if bad news did come would you rather receive it from a friend or direct from the War Office?'

Myra's eyes flashed. She sat up with animation.

'Oh, directly from the officials. I'm a soldier's daughter and a soldier's wife and I should be able to stand anything. If Michael was in great danger or wounded I could share it with him and it would unite me to him more, wouldn't it? I would try to be as brave as he would be.'

The doctor screened his face with his hand. The clock struck six. Then with a great effort, Lady Ingleby said, 'But that wasn't the only reason I left town.' She put out a hand to him. 'Doctor, can I now tell you a thing which has burdened my life for years - - please?'

The doctor was used to such statements and the tense silence which followed. He had to determine whether the confidence should be allowed or not. He turned and looked steadily at the lovely, wistful face. It was the face of an exceedingly beautiful woman, nearing thirty. But the lovely eyes held the clear candour of a child, the sweet lips quivered with emotion and the brow held no trace of shame or sin. He knew he was in the presence of one of the most popular hostesses in London, and one of the most admired women.

Yet his keen, professional insight revealed to him an arrested development and of possibilities unfulfilled. It was, he was sure, a problem of inadequacy and disappointment to which he had not the key. Could he bring help or was he now too late?

'Dear Lady Ingleby,' he said, quietly, 'tell me anything you like, that is to say, anything you feel sure Lord Ingleby would allow discussed with a third person.

Myra leaned back, half amused and gave a little laugh of relief. 'Oh, Michael wouldn't mind.' she said. 'Anything Michael would mind, I've always told straight to him, silly little things like foreign princes looking at me too long or trying to make love. I've never spoken to them again. Oh, no, dear doctor, my life is free of that sort of complication. My trouble is a harder one involving my whole life and Michael's.'

The doctor moved uneasily in his chair and glanced at the clock. 'In any case, I must tell someone. Doctor. I am twenty-eight, I've had ten years of marriage and yet I have never grown up! In my heart I am still an underdeveloped child. I know it and Michael knows it but worse still, Michael doesn't mind. It goes back years. Mother never allowed her girls to grow up. All that was required of us was to follow her opinions. We were allowed no independence or individuality of our own. We grew up but we stayed children - to be snubbed, domineered and bullied. My sisters were good children and eventually Mother chose husbands for them - - perhaps you know how some of those marriages turned out?'

The doctor made a slight sign of assent. One of the unhappy sisters was under treatment with him at the moment but he doubted if Myra knew that.

'I was the black sheep,' sighed Myra. 'Nothing I did was ever right. When Michael met me I was eighteen but really still in the nursery and I was utterly reckless and unhappy. I suddenly realised how Michael's love was full of tenderness and consideration. I was overwhelmed by his kindness to me and complete lack of criticism. Coupled with my gratitude to him was a terror that I might be handed back to Mamma. Michael said later I looked to him like a frightened spaniel and I think that is how he always felt towards me. I was a tenderly loved pet dog. No words can say how good he has been to me. If I should lose him, I should lose everything. Home, a safe life, everything. But if *he* lost Peter that would be more real to Michael.

But can you understand, Sir Deryck? I was in the nursery, then, but I've been in school ever since with no teacher. Michael has always gone straight through my room at night with little Peter under his arm. I knew I had all I deserved, and, well, Michael's kindness and goodness and patience were beyond words. I really wanted to be shaken sometimes and called a fool rather than be left alone. Michael would have smiled at my silly mistakes and let them all pass as not worth correcting then I would have said it in front of a room full of people and wondered why they all smiled. I want to 'grow up, into God in all things'. Yes, I know it is a text, I am famous for misquoting things but it is my true place beside Michael I want to win. Tell me, dear, kind, wise doctor, you have been such a friend to Jane Dalmain and it has made such a difference when she was in trouble. You have done so much for so many women I know, please tell me how I can stop being inadequate towards my husband.'

The passionate flow of words ceased suddenly and Lady Ingleby leaned back against the cushions. Peter sighed in his sleep. A clock in the hall chimed six fifteen. The doctor looked steadily into the fire. He seemed to find speech difficult. At last he said, in a voice which shook slightly, 'Dear Lady Ingleby, he did not, does not, think you are in any way inadequate'

'No, no!' she cried, sitting forward again. 'He thinks of me as nothing more than a nice, affectionate, good-looking dog, and I haven't known what more to be. But sometimes I know he grows unutterably tired of being with me. He goes off to Norway fishing and then mountain climbing and now this horrid war, anywhere to get away alone.'

'Hush, dear,' said the doctor, and laid a firm brown hand on her fluttering ones. 'You are overwrought by all the suspense of these past weeks. You know Lord Ingleby volunteered solely to test his new explosives. He wanted to experiment and try new ideas for electricity at which he has worked so hard and so long. These things I do know.'

'Yes, tiresome things that keep him in the laboratory such a long time. And he has a plan for long distance signalling, too. However, it makes it harder for me when he volunteers to go. Well, nothing really matters, I suppose, so long as he comes back safely. And now, you must help me, tell me how to be strong and give me wise advice.'

The doctor looked again at the clock.

‘You haven’t told me,’ he said, speaking very slowly, as if listening for some other sound, ‘you haven’t told me yet about your second reason for leaving town.’

‘Ah,’ said Myra, and her voice took on a deeper, maturer tone. ‘Yes, I left town, Sir Deryck, because other people were teaching me love-lessons, and I only wanted to learn them from Michael. I stayed with Jane and her blind husband before they went back to Gleneesh. You remember? They were in town for the production of his symphony. I saw that ideal marriage and realised something of the perfection of two people wholly in love. There was nothing wrong from others up to then - only silly things like Billy’s innocent adoration, but I just had to go. Doctor, if I ever learn from another man that which I have failed to learn from my own husband I would implore Michael to kill me.’

The doctor looked up at the portrait over the mantelpiece.

The calm, passionless face smiled at the tiny dog. One sensitive hand, white and delicate as a woman’s was raised, forefinger uplifted, gently holding the attention of the little animal’s eager eyes. The magic skill of the artist supplied the doctor with the key to the problem. A woman, a mate, as wife, as part of himself, was not necessary in the life of this thinker, inventor, scholar, saint. He could appreciate dumb devotion, he was capable of leniency, patience, tolerance. But woman and dog alike, remained outside the citadel of his inner self.

Ten years she had borne his name and even he might not have married her if it had not been for the tyranny of her mother. Her eyes resembling those of a favourite spaniel had awakened a protective instinct within him. The longer the doctor looked, the more Lady Ingleby noticed his intent gaze and leaning forward, also looked up at the picture. The firelight shone on her lovely face and the gleaming softness of her hair. ‘He is so good!’ she said, ‘In all the years he has never spoken to me harshly. The Duchess said she could never live up to his goodness, she would only have me stay at Overdene on my own. She called him Saint Michael and all angels! It is just like her to be so frank. It made me laugh but I just wish I knew him better, after all I am his wife. Nothing can ever take that away, can it?’

The more the Doctor looked at the picture the more it said, ‘We two and where does she come in?’ As he thought of the closed door and the lonely, beautiful woman., righteous anger rose within him. His jaw set and his brow darkened and all the while he listened for a sound, from the outer world which surely must come soon.

The hall clock chimed a quarter to seven. Peter barked and the hall door bell resounded throughout the house. The doctor rose and stood with his back to the fire. Myra’s question remained unanswered. A footman entered with a telegram. Lady Ingleby took it without her usual trembling, full of her conversation with the doctor. His presence made her feel strong and safe. Sir Deryck’s quiet voice spoke to the footman, ‘You need not wait.’

The room was very still. Lady Ingleby opened the telegram and read it through twice. Afterwards she sat on, in such absolute silence that, at length the doctor turned from his gaze in the fireplace to look at her. She met his eyes, quietly. ‘Sir Deryck,’ she said, ‘It is from the War Office. They tell me Michael has been killed. Do you think it is true?’ ‘Dear Lady Ingleby,’ he said, very gently, ‘I fear there is no doubt. He has given his life for his country. You will be as brave as he would wish his wife to be.’

Myra smiled but the doctor saw her face slowly whiten.

'Yes,' she said, 'oh, yes! I won't fail him now. I will be - adequate at last.' A sudden thought struck her.

'Did you know? Is that why you came?'

'Yes,' he said, slowly. 'The duchess sent me. She was at the War Office this morning when the news came in.'

'And you let me go on all about myself'

'My dear,' he said, 'You did not say one word which was not absolutely loving and loyal.'

'How could I have?' queried Myra. 'I never had a thought about my husband that was not loving and loyal.' 'I know,' he said. 'Poor, brave girl, I know.'

Myra read the telegram again. 'Killed,' she said, '*killed*. I wish I knew how.' 'The duchess is ready to come immediately, if you would like it.'

'No,' said Myra, smiling vaguely, 'only if Mother comes, then the Duchess is the only one who can deal with Mamma. No, please, she said she couldn't live up to Michael and that doesn't seem very funny now.'

'Is there anyone I can send for?' inquired the doctor, wondering how much larger and brighter those big grey eyes could grow and whether any living face had ever been so colourless.

'Yes, yes, there is one person, if she could come. Jane, you know? Jane Champion, I mean, Dalmain. Nothing ever bad happens if Jane is here. But, but of course, it has happened, hasn't it?'

The doctor sat down.

'I wired Gleneesh this morning. Jane will be here early tomorrow.'

'Then lots of people knew before I did?' The doctor didn't answer. She rose, her tall, graceful figure drawn up to its full height. His watchful eyes never left her for a moment. Suddenly she looked across at Lord Ingleby's chair. 'But Peter knew,' she said, in a loud, high-pitched voice. 'Good heavens. Peter knew. That's why he refused to eat. And I said he had dyspepsia. Oh, Michael, Michael. Your wife didn't know you were dead. But your dog knew. Oh, Michael, Michael! Little Peter knew!'

She lifted her arms toward the picture of the big man and the tiny dog. 'Oh, Michael!'

Then she swayed backward and the doctor caught her as she fell.

Chapter 4

All through the night Lady Ingleby lay gazing a before her with bright unseeing eyes. The quiet woman from the Lodge who had been, before her own marriage, a devoted companion and maid to Lady Ingleby, arrived in speechless sorrow and helped the doctor tenderly with all there was to do.

But when real consciousness returned to Myra and a realisation of what had happened, they were shown no natural expressions of grief. There was simply a settled, stony silence, a white, set face and bright, unseeing eyes. Margaret O'Mara knelt and wept and prayed rubbing the cold hands gently but Lady Ingleby simply smiled vaguely and once said, 'Hush, my dear Maggie, at last we shall be adequate.'

Several times the doctor came in and sat quietly during the night, watching. Myra scarcely noticed him.

Once he signed for Mrs. O'Mara to follow him outside and quietly closed the door. He like this gentle, self-controlled woman in her simple black gown with neatly curled hair.

'Mrs. O'Mara,' he said, 'she must weep at some time and she must sleep.'

'She doesn't weep easily, doctor,' replied Margaret O'Mara, 'I have known her to be wide awake throughout the night with less cause for sorrow than this.'

'Ah,' said the doctor, and he looked at her keenly. I wonder what else you know, he thought. But he didn't ask. His patients never had to find out that his knowledge of them came through a third person by gossip or any breach of confidence of others. At last he could stand Myra's fixed gaze no longer. In response to Margaret O'Mara's imploring look, he took his case and opened it to find the necessary swift injection. Before long Myra was quietly asleep. The doctor stood looking down on her. There was tragedy to him in this perfect loveliness. Now the clear candour of the grey eyes was veiled and the childlike look was no longer there. It was the face of a woman and of one who had lived and who had suffered.

Watching it, the doctor reviewed the history of those ten years of married life, piercing together all she had told him, his own surmising and all that was common knowledge. So much for the past.

The present, for a few merciful hours, was oblivion. What would the future bring? She had bravely and faithfully put from her all temptation to learn the glory of life and the completeness of love, from any save her own husband. And he had failed to teach. Can the deaf teach harmony, or the blind reveal the beauties of colour?

But, thought he, the future holds no such limitations. until a bold hand swung it wide.

This garden which had been enclosed was no longer barred against all others by an owner who ignored its fragrances. The gate would now be on the latch though all unconscious, But will the right man pass by? Is there one strong enough among us, mused the doctor. She is nearly thirty and these lessons should have been learned in the golden days of girlhood. Surely somewhere on this earth there walks the one man to whom she could be the one woman.

He prayed fervently that God would send him her way in the fullness of time. Deryck Brand looked up and saw the quiet eyes of Margaret O'Mara gazing gratefully at him.

'Thank you so much,' she said, fervently. 'Yes, an injection like that is never to be done lightly, Mrs. O'Mara. Everything else should be tried first. Send for me when she wakes. Meanwhile, lie down on the couch yourself and get some sleep. You look worn out.' The doctor paused a moment at the door then laid a hand on her shoulder. He saw some kind of anguish in her eyes. 'Mrs. O'Mara,' he said, slowly, 'you have trouble of your own?' She drew away quickly. 'Oh, don't ask me. Not now. I must think only of her at the moment.' She drew out a crumpled telegram from her bosom and handed it to him. 'Mine came at the same time.'

'Regret to report Sergeant O'Mara killed in assault on
Targai yesterday.'

'He was a good husband,' said Margaret O'Mara, simply, 'and we were very happy.'

The doctor held out his hand. 'I'm proud to have met you, Mrs. O'Mara. This seems to me the bravest thing I have known a woman to do.' She smiled through her tears.

'Thank you, but it is easier when there is someone else to see to.'

'God comfort you, my friend,' said Deryck Brand. It was all he could trust his voice to say..

The doctor had finished breakfast and was thinking of a train back to town when word came that Lady Ingleby was awake. He went upstairs immediately. Myra was sitting up in bed, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright and hard. She held out her hands. 'How good you have been,' she said, speaking very fast in a high unnatural voice. 'I'm afraid I have given you so much trouble. I don't remember much about last night but I am told Michael is dead. Do you think it is really true? Will they give me details Surely I have a right to know. Nothing can alter the fact that I was Michael's wife, can it? Do go to breakfast, Maggie, everyone wants breakfast at 9 o'clock in the morning. It is no good saying you don't want any and just standing there smiling. Tell her to go, Sir Deryck. It is such a comfort to have her but I think she has been here all night.'

'Go downstairs for a little while, Mrs. O'Mara,' said the doctor, gently. As she moved to the door the famous London specialist was there before her holding the door wide for the sergeant's young widow with such deference he would have bestowed on a queen.

He came back. His task was not finished although his train left in under an hour.

'Where is Peter?' enquired the excited voice from the bed. 'He always barks to be let out in the morning.'

'He was exhausted last night, my dear,' said the doctor, 'I wrapped him in the coat again and put him on the bed. He licked my hand and seemed to lie down quite content.'

'Please fetch him, Sir Deryck, he is all I have left of Michael now.' The doctor went into the adjoining room. Myra heard him reach the bed. Then followed a long silence.

'What is it? - - - Why are you so long?'

The doctor came back and he was carrying something in his arms, wrapped in the old shooting jacket.

'Dear Lady Ingleby,' he said, 'little Peter is dead. He must have died in the night in his sleep. He is lying just as I left him. Dear faithful, little Peter.'

'Oh, no,' cried Myra, 'Peter has died because Michael died, oh, no, and I haven't even shed a tear.'

Myra fell back among the pillows in a paroxysm of weeping. The doctor stood by silently, uncertain what to do. Myra's sobs grew more violent with incoherent cries of Michael. Just at that moment he heard the horn of a motor on the drive and a look of immense relief came over his face.

He went to the top of the stairs and looked into the hall. The Honourable Mrs. Dalmain had arrived from Scotland. The doctor saw her tall figure rapidly cross the hall. 'Jane!' he said, 'Jeanette dear, I knew you wouldn't fail me. Come straight up. You have arrived just at the right moment.'

Jane looked up, threw him a smile of greeting and reassurance. Then, wasting no time in words, she flung her coat, hat and fur gloves to the astonished butler.

The doctor waited only to see her actually mount the stairs, then gently laid little Peter's body back on his master's bed, still wrapped in the old coat.

As he stepped back into lady Ingleby's room, closing the door, he saw Jane Dalmain kneel down beside the bed and gather the weeping form into her arms with a gesture of immense protective tenderness.

'Oh, Jane,' he heard, 'little Peter died and Michael died and I hadn't even shed a tear.'

The doctor passed quickly out. He had left his patient in safe hands. Jane was there, at last. All would be well.

Chapter 5

Lady Ingleby leaned back in a corner of the compartment of the express for Cornwall. She closed her eyes and gave herself up to quiet reflection.

She had looked her last on Margaret O'Mara's anxious, devoted face and realised her somewhat original rest cure had really started. Seven months had passed. The thin, white face had lost the tints and contours of perfect health but every now and then the sweet, expressive mouth curled into a smile and an unexpected dimple gave a youthful look to the tired face. It was a sad face in repose, with regret but no bitterness.

When London was completely left behind and the summer sunshine blazed through the window from the clear blue of a radiant June sky, Lady Ingleby leaned forward watching rapid unfolding of country lanes and hedges, wide commons. There was an indescribable greenness and soft fragrance of England in early summer. The wild roses and honeysuckle brought a responsive light to her sweet grey eyes. The drier autumn, the deadness of winter, the chill uncertainty of spring - - all these were over and gone.

She realised it was all behind her and she was leaving not only her worries but her very identity too.

'Flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds has come.'

As she remembered the quotation, in Myra Ingleby's sad heart there blossomed timidly some vague hope and promise of future joy which life might yet hold in store.

A blackbird trilled gaily and Myra sang softly to herself Garth Dalmain's 'Blackbird Song.'

Wake, wake,
Sad heart!

Rise up, and sing!

On God's fair earth, 'mid blossoms blue, Fresh hope

musteverspring There is no room for sad despair,

When heaven's love is everywhere.'

Then, as the train sped onwards through Wiltshire, Somerset and Devon, Lady Ingleby felt the despondency slipping away.

She felt like a prisoner reviewing the past but from a sunlit open door as he stands at last on the thresh-hold of freedom. Since the news of Lord Ingleby's death the weeks that followed had seemed vague and dreamlike to Myra with just a few events standing out clearly from the dim blur of misery.

She remembered the reliable strength of the doctor; the unselfish devotion of Margaret; the unspeakable comfort of Jane's understanding and tenderness. Then the dreaded arrival of her mother, followed immediately by the protective advent of Georgina, Duchess of Meldrum. Then it seemed that comedy and tragedy had walked together, with the silence of mourning enlivened by the 'hoity-toity' of the Duchess and the indignant sniffs of Myra's mother.

Later on, details of Lord Ingleby's death had been personally explained to her by someone high up in the War Office,

Michael's widow had to learn that he had fallen at Targai, not at the hands of the enemy but through an unfortunate mistake by one of his friends. Myra never clearly grasped the details. It was a fearful explosion of his own patent electrical plan. He had insisted on placing it himself and the mistaking of a signal had caused his instant death. But she had also learned that his skill and courage had, nevertheless, made a way through for the British troops to reach an unexpected victory.

There was also the information given to her that young officers were assisting him, more or less experimentally and unofficially.

Myra had heard with her large pathetic eyes shining with sudden brightness. 'Don't tell me, please, any name of anyone who may have made a mistake which caused my husband's death,' she had said, 'I may never want to meet him or shake his hand!' She promised herself she would never even try to guess.

The high-up war Office personage had been obviously relieved and filled with admiration for Lord Ingleby's beautiful and right-minded widow. She had always been charming. Now, he thought, she had added sound good sense to personal charm!

Although she had been honest in her decision, Myra found it difficult not to remember the two men mentioned constantly by Michael in his letters as being always with him in his experiments. They had shared his interests and his dangers - Ronald Ingram and Billy Cathcart. They were fine men, both her devoted and close friends, faithful and trusted. Now the haunting questions circled her mind constantly. Was it Ronald who made the mistake or was it Billy? Myra had said, 'I won't even try to guess,' but she guessed

inspite of not trying. The certainty and uncertainty began to play havoc with her nerves. It was becoming a mental torment.

Time went on and the frontier war was over. England had learnt wisdom by a series of initial mistakes expending large amounts of British gold and British blood. Her supremacy had been satisfactorily asserted and the wounded began to come home; among them Ronald Ingram and Billy. Ronald was obviously older than when he went out, worn and gaunt and pale beneath his bronze, showing unmistakable signs of a severe wound. 'Too interesting for words,' said the Duchess and promptly installed him in Overdene to be nursed back to health and strength. 'If only I were fifty years younger, I'd marry the boy immediately - oh, you need not look so shocked, my dear Myra! I always mean what I say.' Ronald had the time of his life being pampered and spoiled by the dear, old duchess, never allowing her to think for one moment the Overdene's chief attraction was its easy motoring distance from Shenstone Park.

Billy returned as young and irrepressible as ever but in him, too, Myra was conscious of a subtle change and could not help but think that it may be guilt in his part of the accident. The fact was, that both these young men, who had previously admired Lady Ingleby, now felt all restraints on their affections lifted.

This produced a shyness in them toward her which Myra felt was for other reasons. They had all been very close but with Lord Ingleby not now needing their loyalty, there were tensions when they all met, however informally, that could not be relaxed. Into this atmosphere of misunderstanding and uncertainty, a first cousin of Lord Ingleby's who had come into the title, assumed that the title and estates might as well go together! To that end he intruded as often as possible upon Myra's privacy, intending to win her in a businesslike manner. Myra had suddenly awoke to an understanding of her liberty and her whole outlook on life changed.

Billy and Ronald ceased to be a comfort to her. Their miseries assumed a new importance and all the Duchess's veiled hints began to alarm her. Every man became a dreaded suitor. She recognised all her morbid contemplations but suddenly felt unable to handle them.

She left Shenstone in a hurry and fled to town to see Sir Deryck.

'My dear friend, please help me again. I don't feel able to cope with life!

Not with anything at all. What am I to do and how am I to go on with it all?'

The doctor heard her patiently, aiding her all he could by his strong understanding and a full and patient consultation. Then he said quietly, 'Dear lady, the diagnosis is not difficult and there is only one possible remedy.' He paused. Her imploring eyes sought his.

'A rest cure,' he said. 'Oh, please,' cried Myra, 'Please don't shut me up with sick people and give me awful things like rice pudding. My figure would disappear in a week. Can't you give me something in a bottle, or some pills to take three times a day?'

The doctor smiled. 'Your highly coloured description of a rest cure is not what I would give you. It would be worse than useless. Besides, I would be shutting you up with the one person you need to get away from - - the one person who is doing you harm. A very charming person but where the rest of mankind are concerned, very bad for you now - - I mean, Lady Ingleby,' said the doctor, gravely, 'when I send you away, Lady Ingleby must be left behind with all her worries and questions, all her doubts and fears. I shall

send you to a little out-of-the-way village on the wild coast of Cornwall where you know nobody and no-one knows you. You must go completely incognito, take any name you like. You will be set free from all your responsibilities and perplexities and also from your position in life. Roam about all day in the open air; rise early and go to bed early and eat plenty of wholesome food. My cure consists of your writing one letter a week and only to someone I approve. Nobody else is to know where you are. Tomorrow I shall give you the name of the place I recommend. Now, we are nearing the end of May and I would like you to start on the first of June. If you want a house party at Shenstone you may invite your guests for the first of July or better still - August. Lady Ingleby will be home by then completely able to maintain her popularity as a gracious hostess - - - Yes, Jane can be your correspondent, you couldn't have chosen better.'

As the doctor's patients never disputed his prescriptions, Myra found herself, on the first of walk in and hoped she had had a pleasant journey. Then she rang a large bell twice to June, flying south on a Cornish express bound for the little fishing village of Tregarth where she had ordered rooms at the Moorhead Hotel in the name of Mrs.O'Mara.

Chapter 6

The ruddy glow of a crimson sunset illuminated cliff and hamlet, tinting the distant ocean into every shade of golden glory. Myra walked up the gravelled path to the rustic porch of the Moorhead Inn and looked around her with a growing sense of excited refreshment.

She had come on foot from the little railway station carrying as much luggage as she could manage, leaving the rest to follow in a cart. This in itself was a lovely novelty to her. At the door she was received by the stately proprietress, dressed in black satin, wearing a double row of jet black beads. This reminded her instantly of Lord Ingleby's maiden aunts. She seemed a concentrated embodiment of them all. It made her giggle slightly and she longed for Billy to share the joke. 'Aunt Ingleby' requested Mrs. O'Mara to summon a maid and showed Myra the visitor's book. 'Would she write her name, please?'

Lady Ingleby walked into the hall, passed a smoking room and noted a room marked 'Coffee-room'. From the centre of the hall a large old-fashioned staircase went to the first floor and by it stood a reception desk with a table and a large visitor's book. A fresh page had been recently started with four names. The first three were dated May the 8th and read in crabbed, precise writing - - Miss Amelia Murgatroyd

Miss Eliza Murgatroyd

Miss Suzannah Murgatroyd

And all from Lawn View, Putney.

Below these, bearing a date a week later, in precise writing of unmistakable character and clearness, the name, Jim Airth London
Pen and ink lay ready and not troubling to remove her gloves, Myra wrote without a qualm, in large, sprawling handwriting,

Mrs. O.Mara The Lodge, Shenstone.

A maid appeared, took her cloak and bag, and preceded her up the stairs. As she reached the turn of the stairs, Lady Ingleby paused and looked back to the hall.

The door of the smoking room opened and a very tall man came out, taking a pipe from his Norfolk jacket. As he strolled into the hall she saw his face, deep-bronzed and thin, like Ronald's but an older face, strong, rugged and purposeful. She thought he had a massive chin and jaw and did not like what she saw.

Catching sight of a fresh name in the book, he paused, laid a massive hand on the table and bent over to read it.

Myra stood and watched, noting the broad shoulders and the immense length of limb in khaki leather. He appeared to study the open page for longer than seemed necessary. He then reached for his cap from the antler of a stag's head on the wall, stuck it on the back of his head, swung round and went out through the porch, whistling like a blackbird.

Myra took time to write her first letter to Jane as soon as she could.

The Moorhead Inn
Tregarth, Cornwall.

My dear Jane,

I had barely whispered your name when Sir Deryck jumped at you as my possible correspondent. He said you were 'wholesome'. Dear Jane, I hope you do not mind that expression but it is so essential that I write and tell you everything and I know you won't ever be bored with my silliness. It was a stroke of genius on the doctor's part to set me free from myself. I really enjoy being called Mrs. O'Mara. And it is amazing how I love being without a maid although it takes me ages to do my hair. I have serious thoughts of just letting it hang down my back!

When I remember the poor, harassed, exhausted society-self I left behind, I feel like buying a bucket and spade and building sand castles. But I have no-one to play with. The Miss Murgatroyds, I am sure, have never made sand castles and already look shocked at me.

But it is the freedom that is so marvellous. Everything I see and hear gives me such joy - the birds, the Atlantic breakers, the fishermen and their picturesque thatched cottages.

Everything seems so alive.

My Inn is lovely, primitive but comfortable. Stray travellers come and go, staying for lunch and putting up for one night but otherwise there are now only four other permanent guests.

They give me endless amusement.

The Miss Murgatroyds, three of them and so antediluvian and quaint! Three ancient sisters. They call the Americans who come 'foreigners'. I felt I ought to apologize for my fellow-country women but the Americans, overflowing with good humour, explained that they had expressly come to see British relics of all kinds! Oh, Jane, they thought the Miss Murgatroyds had stepped right out of Dickens. I dare not confess I haven't read much Dickens.

I must tell you about these dear sisters. Suzannah, the youngest at sixty something, is quite kittenish and giddy; Miss Murgatroyd, Amelia, is the eldest and lays down the law and is very precise about asking for the crumpets to be passed, etcetera, and Miss Eliza in the middle, is meek and unoffending and always apologetic. Suzie is the lively one and would be a flirt if she dared. She is pink and white and soft. Jim Airth opened the door for her one day and she has been in a flutter ever since.

Now, I must tell you about Jim Airth. Please don't tell the doctor or he will move me on but I am extremely interested in Jim Airth. The trouble is, he went through that terrible campaign last year and came out with a bad fever. I think that is why he is here. Suzie told me as much as she knows about him. It is very sweet and generous of me to admit that I am interested in him because Jim Airth is not a bit interested in me. In fact he hardly gives me a word or a glance. He looks like a savage but a very fine, good-looking one! He has immense limbs and is the tallest man I know but he moves with very supple grace. Although he looks very stern he has the loveliest blue eyes and seems to have a great deal of satisfaction in playing up to Suzie's coyness. She drops a handkerchief on purpose sometimes and he gallantly picks it up but I am sure he would tread on mine if I did the same! Oh, I do ramble on but just one more thing - he smokes an old briar pipe and whistles like a blackbird.

My dear Jane, I must continue. Miss Murgatroyd the elder, tells me Jim Airth is not a bit interested in feminine beauty and poor Miss Suzannah prinks herself in front of the mirror and says, 'Oh, Amelia, don't say so!' So Miss Amelia says, 'But I do say so, and a lot more, too.'

Jim Airth is a favourite form of conversation here and, listen to this, Jane, the Miss Murgatroyds have told me he turns out to be an author! Isn't that strange, when he looks like a cowboy! And, stranger still, he is working on a book called Modern Warfare; its Methods and Requirements. He went right through that border war and took part in the assault on Targai.

This is really why you mustn't breathe a word about him to dear Sir Deryck. Do you think Jim Airth knew Michael?

All this information I get from helping the Miss Murgatroyds to wind wool after dinner! Ah, Jane. As I walk along the cliffs and listen to the seagulls and breakers pounding down below I am realising the strength and power and liberty of nature and all the growth and progress which accompanies life. I feel as though I have never really lived. I have just dawdled through life. I should, by now, have felt love was a reality. But I have just done what I pleased and never been, what I call, mastered and made to do another's will. You will know what I mean. I realise now that there is a key to life and a key to love which has never been given to me. What it is, I don't know but if I ever learn it will be from just such a man as Jim Airth. I've never really talked with him and if I mention his name again you will think I am infected with Suzie's flutter but I am so conscious of his strength and grace. This you will find very strange as although he makes me aware of a fresh outlook on life, he has shown me no courtesies of any kind and given few signs of being conscious of my presence. This is a novel experience for me for, as you know, I have been spoilt by senseless admiration all along.

Dear Jane, thank you for listening. Please tell Garth I loved his last song. I sing it to myself often along the cliff path. I love it but I can't play the tune. It is too complicated.

'On God's fair earth, 'mid blossoms blue, Fresh hope must ever spring.'

How is your little Geoffrey? Has he the beautiful shining eyes we all remember with Garth?

I have often laughed over your account of his stay at Overdene and how the dear, naughty duchess stirred him up to rebel against his nurse. You must have had your hands full when you and Garth returned from America.

Yours, dear Jane, Gratefully and Affectionately, Myra Ingleby.
Castle Gleneesh, N.B.

My dear Myra, I'll get straight to the point. I am very interested in the account of your fellow guests. I don't misunderstand you at all, dear, when you talk of Jim Airth. But remember, dear, that what I feel you think of as an abstract account of strong manhood, where living men and women are concerned, that is apt suddenly to become perilously personal. You have had a sense of being out adrift and very lonely for a long time. Your future happiness maybe involved before you realise the danger. But I do fail to understand the man's avoidance of you. He sounds the sort who would be friendly and pleasant to all woman and passionately loyal to one. Perhaps your sweet loveliness reminds him of some long-closed page of his past history and he may shrink from the pain of all that. Garth thoroughly enjoyed our trip to America. You know why we went? Since he lost his sight, all sounds mean so much to him. He is boyishly eager to hear everything there is to be heard in the world. He set his heart on hearing Niagara. So off we went. His enjoyment was complete when at last he stood close to the Horseshoe Falls, on the Canadian side, where the spray showers all over you and the great rushing boom seems all around. As we stood together, a little bird on a twig beside us, began to sing, Garth has put it all in a symphony.

I am so glad you like the Americans. They always seem to come near to meet with us with very prompt interest and appreciation. We can make more friends in that land of ready sympathies than we can in a year of all our stiff social functions.

Yes, Geoffrey's eyes are bright and shining and the true golden brown, just like his father's. Garth sends his love and promises to write a tune for the 'Blackbird's song' which could easily be played with one finger.

He is also parcelling up something of Dickens for you. It seems strange to address this to you as Mrs. O'Mara but it reminds me of a time when I changed my identity and used someone else's name. I pray that your experiment may end as happily as mine.

Myra, dearest, there is a best for every life and sometimes it is only reached by very rocky paths. It is worthwhile if you can stand a short time of painful waiting. From all you have told me, my dear, of the past, the best has not yet come your way. Keep on expecting and do not be content with anything less than that. We certainly must not tell Deryck about Jim Airth being at Targai. He would move you immediately.

Yours with so much love, Jane Dalmain.

Chapter 7

Lady Ingleby sat in the honeysuckle arbour, pouring her tea from a little brown earthenware teapot and spreading substantial slices of home-made bread with the creamiest of farm butter, when the aged postman hobbled up the garden path of the Moorhead Inn with Jane's letter to Mrs. O.Mara. Smiling at her own hesitation and yet keen delight in seeing another name than her own, she opened it with great pleasure. She

realised she had been accustomed to receiving a dozen letters a day and had passed a week now without any.

She read rapidly, once laughing aloud and once a sudden colour flamed her cheeks. Then she helped herself to the real heather honey, golden in the comb and read the letter again carefully, weighing each word. Well, well, she thought - that is very neatly put, 'the safely abstract thoughts (about Jim Airth) might become perilously personal!' Could over six feet of abstraction, eating its breakfast completely unconscious of my presence, returning my timid good-morning, with necessary politeness, possibly ever become perilously personal?

Lady Ingleby laughed again and cut herself a slice of home-made currant cake. She finished with a final cup of tea and thought with amusement of the difference between this substantial meal in the honeysuckle arbour of the old inn and the fashionable teas going on in crowded drawing rooms all over town where people hurried in and took a luke warm cup of tea and a miserably thin piece of bread and butter and gossiped about mutual friends. Why ever do we do it, she thought, taking up her red parasol. She crossed the lawn and stood at the garden gate in the afternoon sunlight, debating which way to go. Usually her walks took her along the top of the cliffs where the larks springing from the short turf and waving clumps of harebells, sang themselves up into the sky. She loved being high above the sea and hearing the breakers roar below. But today, the steep little street down through the fishing village to the cove, looked inviting. The tide was out and the sands were golden. Besides, from her seat in the arbour, she had just seen Jim Airth striding along the cliff top in the other direction. So that settled the matter.

The friendly Cornish folk, sitting in the doorsteps in the sunshine, smiled at the lovely woman in white serge, who passed down their village street, so tall and graceful, beneath the shade of her scarlet parasol. The doctor's prescription had included the discarding of all her widow's weeds and it seemed quite natural to Myra to come down to her first Cornish breakfast in white.

She walked quickly along the firm, smooth sand, pausing occasionally to pick up a beautifully marked stone or a brilliant sea-anemone.

Presently she climbed over slippery rocks and found herself in a fascinating cove. The line of cliffs made a horseshoe and the little bay, within the curve, was a place of almost fairy-like beauty. The sand was a soft glistening white, decked with delicate crimson seaweed. Crabs scudded sideways at her shadow and darting shrimps buried themselves in the sand.

The cliffs, towering above, gave a welcome shade to the shoreline but the sun still sparkled on the waves. Myra walked to the centre, scooped out a comfortable hollow, struck her open parasol in the sand, laid her head on a piece of driftwood. She was shielded behind the parasol from any passing stranger above.

She settled comfortably in the soft hollow, lay back, watching through half-closed lids the fleeting shadows, the blue sky, the gently moving sea. Little white clouds went by. The moving rippled of the water was too far away to break the silence.

Lady Ingleby's eyelids drooped lower. The long walk, the sea breeze, the distant lapping of the water, all combined to do their soothing work.

‘Yes, my dear Jane,’ she murmured, dreamily, watching a white sail pass into the distance, ‘undoubtedly a well-expressed sentence, but far - - from - - being fact, surely - - -
‘ Lady Ingleby slept peacefully in Horseshoe Cove while the rising tide crept in.

An hour later a man swung along the path at the summit of the cliffs, whistling like a blackbird. The sun was setting and as he walked, he revelled in the gold and crimson of the sky and the opal tints on the heaving sea. The wind had risen as the sun set and the breakers were pounding along the shore. Suddenly something caught his eye - a scarlet poppy on the sands. He walked on and his rapid stride brought him to the centre of the cliff above the cove.

‘Good Lord,’ said Jim Airth, and stood very still. He had caught sight of Lady Ingleby’s white skirt in the sand beyond the scarlet parasol. ‘Good heavens, it’s not a poppy at all!’ He saw he was completely alone. Scanning the horizon there was not a boat in sight. He looked round. He could not run the two miles to get back with a boat in under three quarters of an hour. Then he looked down at the cove and saw the water rising so that both ends were now cut off.

‘It will sweep the whole cove in twenty minutes or so,’ he calculated. Beneath the spot where he stood more than half way down was some sort of a ledge.

Letting himself down, holding tufts of grass, shrubs and jutting stones, he managed to reach the ledge. ‘Now what?’ he said aloud. He paused and looked over the edge. Sixty feet at least remained, he judged, and a precipitous slope, with nothing to hold onto or to which a hand could cling.

‘Well, here goes,’ Jim Airth buttoned his jacket, slipped his feet over the edge and glissaded down on his back, bending his knees at the moment his feet hit the sand. For a moment the shock stunned him. He was within ten yards of the red parasol, on a small strip of sand still left uncovered by the rapidly advancing sweep of the tide.

Lady Ingleby suddenly opened her eyes.

Sea and sky were still there but between them, closer than sea and sky, looking down on her with a tense light in his blue eyes, stood Jim Airth.

‘I’ve been asleep!’ she said.

‘You have,’ said Jim Airth, ‘and meanwhile the sun has set and the tide has come up. Let me help you up.’

Lady Ingleby put her hand in his and he helped her to her feet. She stood beside him gazing with startled eyes at the expanse of sea, the rushing waves and the tiny strip of sand.

‘The tide seems very high,’ she said. ‘Very high,’ agreed Jim Airth.

He stood close to her but his eyes were scanning the horizon.

‘We seem to be cut off,’ said Myra. ‘We are cut off,’ replied he, laconically, ‘Then I should think we better have a boat,’ said Lady Ingleby. ‘A very good suggestion,’ replied Jim Airth, drily, ‘if there was a boat to be had. Unfortunately we are two miles from the village. When I saw you from the cliff I wondered about the chances of getting one and be back here in time. But before I could have returned with the boat, you would have been - - - er - - - very wet,’ finished Jim Airth, lamely.

He looked at the lovely face close to his own shoulder. It was pale and serious but showed no sign of fear. He glanced at the point of cliff beyond.

The water was twenty feet now above its base but round that point would be safety.

'Can you swim?' he asked, eagerly. Myra's calm grey eyes met his steadily. 'If you put your hand under my chin, hold me up and count one, two - one, two, very quickly, I can swim nearly ten yards.' Jim Airth laughed. His eyes met hers, in sudden comprehending friendship. 'I see,' he said, slowly. 'Then swimming is out.' 'Not for you,' said Myra, earnestly. 'Swimming is not out for you but you couldn't go with me, holding me up, in that whirlpool. We would both be drowned. But you can do it easily alone. You go, go now, quickly. I - - I shall be all right I 'll just sit against the cliff and wait. You might be in time to get back. But don't worry a bout me, just go. I've always loved the sea.'

Jim Airth looked at her again with something like admiration in his eyes.

'Mmm - very brave,' he said, 'but I think not. 'I take it you are a wife of a soldier, perhaps a mother of future soldiers, no wonder we are a strong fighting race!' 'Well, I'm not afraid to die, if that's what you mean, that's certain, but I beg you to go and not to talk any more now - - I am a soldier's daughter and also a soldier's widow but it wasn't given to me to be a mother. Look, hold my hand once more and then go.' Jim Airth took the hand held out to him but kept it firmly in his own. 'Do you really suppose I would go and leave you? I wouldn't leave any woman to drown alone, but you, you, of all women. Do you think I could go and leave - -' he broke off abruptly. Myra smiled. Whatever did he mean. His hand was very strong and her heart felt strangely restful and he had said, 'You, of all women,' in that funny way. Her unflinching instinct was to be tactful even in what seemed likely to be her last moments! 'I'm sure you would leave no woman in danger,' she said, 'but some might have been easier to save. Plump little Miss Suzie might have floated.' Jim Airth's big laugh rang out again. 'And Miss Murgatroyd could have sailed away in her big cameo broach.'

The laugh had broken the spell which held them both inactive.

'Come on,' he cried, 'we haven't a moment to lose. Look, can you see the long slide, the way I came down. I tobogganed down on my back. It is pretty steep with nothing to hold onto, I admit, but not so very far up is a blessed ledge about six foot long and about four foot wide.'

He pulled out a huge clasp knife and began to hack with the largest blade. 'We must climb,' said Jim Airth. 'I've never climbed,' whispered Myra's voice behind him. 'You will climb today,' said Jim Airth. 'I could never even climb trees,' whispered Myra, a little desperation creeping into her voice. 'You must climb a cliff tonight. It's our only chance.' He hacked on rapidly. Suddenly he paused. 'Show me how far you can reach, mine will be too far. Now, stretch up with your left hand. Now your right - - good.. One step more or less would make a lot of difference. Now, listen, while I work. What a Godsend this sand is. If it had been rock we would be in trouble. You must choose what you want to do. I could scrape you a ledge out of reach of the water, leaving you there, while I go up and finish; you could climb in front while I helped from below or you could follow me, step by step, while I cut them.'

'I couldn't wait on a ledge along,' said Myra. 'I'll follow you step by step.'

'Good girl,' said Jim Airth. 'It will save time. I'm afraid you must take off your shoes and stockings. It will have to be bare feet. Do that now. You will need to stick your toes in the sand and make them cling on like fingers.'

He pulled off his own boots and socks, pulled out the belt from his jacket and tied it firmly round his ankle. It hung down behind him. 'See that?' he said, 'when your foot is in the niches below me it should hang down by your hands. If you are slipping, catch hold of that. Only, if possible, shout first and don't do it unless it is really necessary. Remember, if you fall, I fall too.'

He picked up Myra's shoes and stockings and stuffed them into his big pockets. At that moment an advancing wave rushed up the sand and caught their bare feet. 'Oh, Jim Airth,' Myra cried, 'please go on with out me. I haven't got a steady head. I can't climb.' He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. 'You can climb,' he said, 'you must climb and you will climb. We climb or drown. You wont be saving me if you drown.'

'Oh, no, what am going to do. You don't understand. I've got nothing really to live for.' She looked up into his eyes despairingly. 'I'm quite alone in the world, it wont make any difference to anyone.' 'So am I,' said Jim Airth, 'and I have been worse than alone for ten years or more. There is life to be lived for. Do you want to throw away the best gift of all. Good heavens girl. I must live, and so must you!'

He loosed her shoulders, took hold of her wrists and held her trembling hands against his breast. They stood for a moment in complete silence. Myra felt herself completely dominated and her fear seemed slipping away but she knew the assurance and peace she had was his and not her own. She lifted her head and faced him with white lips. 'I wont fall,' she said. Another wave swept round their ankles and stayed there. 'Good, now, next time I look into your face, please God, we shall be safe. Now, climb,' he said, authoritatively. 'Follow me, slowly and carefully. We are not going to hurry.' He sprang up the face of the cliff at the highest point he could reach. 'Are you there?' he said, 'Good. Now don't look down, and don't look up, keep your eyes on my heels. As soon as I move come into the empty space. See? Can you manage? Good. On we go then. It wont take long. No, don't look up or down. Mind the sand in your eyes. Supposing the Miss Murgatroyds look over at us and see our bare feet, sorry, don't laugh. This is a lovely knife, I bought it in Mexico. We are a third of the way now. All right, I won't mention the Miss Murgatroyds.' Jim Airth kept a continual bantering talk. 'Let's sing - - No? All right. I will. Yo-o, heave ho - - yo-o, heave ho - - And keep our bones from Davy Jones, where-ever we may be. Yo-o, heave ho! I can see the ledge. Oh no, never mind, It's nothing. I nearly dropped the knife ' Jim Airth's deep voice rang out as he endeavoured to keep singing. 'Can you hear me? Sing if you can.' 'And keep our bones from Davy Jones whoever he may be,' quavered Lady Ingleby, making one final effort to move into the vacant niches, although very conscious that her fingers and toes were so numb that she couldn't feel them grip the sand.

Then Jim Airth's whole body vanished suddenly from above her, as he drew himself onto the ledge. 'Here we go,' came his happy voice. She couldn't move. She could only remain where she was, clinging to the face of the cliff. She suddenly thought of a particular fly on the wall of her nursery years ago. She had followed its ascent with a small interested finger until her nurse had come in with a duster saying, 'Nasty thing,' and ruthlessly flicked it off. The fly had fallen, dead, onto the carpet. Lady Ingleby felt herself falling. She gave one agonising glance upward to the towering cliff with the line of sky above. Then everything swayed and rocked. 'The widow of a soldier must fall

without screaming,' her brain insisted. Then a long arm shot down from above and a strong hand gripped her firmly 'One step more, I can lift you,' said Airth's voice close to her ear. She made the effort and he drew her onto the ledge beside him. 'Thank you very much, so much' said she, weakly. 'Who, who was Davy Jones?'

Jim Airth's face was streaming with perspiration. His mouth was full of sand. His heart was beating in his throat but he loved her courage for trying to sing. So he laughed as he put his arm around her, holding her tightly so that she would not realise how much she was trembling. 'Davy Jones is a gentleman who has a locker at the bottom of the sea where all drowned things go. Your lovely red parasol has gone there with my boots. But we may as well give him those.' Then he spoke more gently. 'Yes, do have a good cry, don't mind me. But don't you think we two, between us, could say some sort of prayer of thanks? If ever two people were in trouble together and almost faced death, it is us, together, and here we are - alive.'

Chapter 8

Myra never forgot Jim Airth's prayer. For the first time in her whole life, prayer became a reality. As she crouched on the ledge beside him shaking uncontrollably, but for his arm around her, she almost lost her balance and fell. Although she wondered if it was the first time he had prayed aloud and as he expressed in simple unorthodox language, his gratitude for life and safety and an earnest petition for safe keeping through the night and complete deliverance in the morning, it seemed to Myra that the heavens opened and she felt the presence of God surrounding them both in their strange isolation.

An immense peace filled her. By the time his disjointed, halting sentences were finished, Myra had ceased trembling. When Jim Airth, suddenly at a loss to know how to end his prayer, began 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Myra's sweet voice united with his, was full of earnest fervour.

At the final words, Jim Airth withdrew his arm and a shy silence fell between them. The emotions of the mind had woken an awkwardness of body. In uniting with the prayer their souls had leapt on, beyond a place where their bodies were prepared to follow. Lady Ingleby saved the situation. She turned to Jim Airth with her own inimitable sweetness which could not be withstood. In the rapidly deepening twilight he could see the large wistful grey eyes in the white oval of her face.

'Do you know,' she said, 'I really couldn't sit all night on a ledge this size with someone I had to call 'Mr.'. I am afraid you will have to call me Myra and do you think I could call you Jim? Otherwise I shall have to climb down and swim home and if you call me Mrs. O'Mara I might get quite hysterical.'

Jim Airth answered with a quiet huskiness - 'Well, we are old friends now, aren't we? Each of those minutes on the cliff were a year. Anyway I come from a long line of Quakers and they always used to use first names. And that minute I nearly lost the knife must have been about ten years, don't you think? No, don't think. Now you must try and put your shoes and stockings on and keep warm and also try and guard against cramp too,

although I have some experience of that and I think I can deal with it. It comes from lying in one position sometimes, without moving.'

Jim Airth produced her shoes and stockings from his pocket.

'Jim,' said Myra, 'how long will we have to sit here?'

He made a quick movement as though the sound of his name from her lips for the first time meant a great deal to him. There was an added depth in his voice 'It would be impossible to climb from here to the top of the cliff. When I came down it was a sheer drop and the cliff top slightly overhangs us. Can you see? As far as the tide is concerned we might clamber down in about three hours. We must have some light when we try if I am to land you safe and unshaken at the bottom, so if we reckon on the sun rising about 3.45 a.m. it will be a little light before that so we should reach the Moorhead Inn by about four o'clock. Let's hope the Miss Murgatroyd's will not be looking out of their windows at that time in the morning.' 'Whatever will they be thinking of us now?' said Myra.

'I don't know and I don't care,' said Jim, happily. 'You are alive and I am alive, and that is all that matters apart from our record climb.'

'No, but seriously, Jim?'

'Well, I am sometimes out for dinner and let myself in quite late. What about you?'

'Well, strangely enough,' said Myra, 'I am supposed to be on a rest cure and if I lock my door at night and the maid calls and I don't answer, she goes away without worrying. She doesn't come back then until the morning so most likely she has done the same tonight.'

'Then I don't suppose they will send out a search party,' said Jim Airth. 'No,' reflected Myra, 'we are very alone down here. And anyway we only matter to ourselves.'

'And to each other.' Jim Airth said, quietly. Myra's heart stood still. Those four words, spoken so simply by that deep, tender voice, meant more to her than any words had ever meant. She couldn't quite understand it. And for a moment there was complete silence. The words made for themselves a vast holy temple of wonder and realisation so that they echoed back and forth, repeating themselves again and again. The two on the ledge sat listening.

A chant of mutual possession so suddenly set going was too beautiful a thing to be interrupted by other words.

Even Lady Ingleby's unfailing habit of tactful speech was not allowed to spoil the deep sweetness of this unexpected situation. Myra's heart was waking, and when the heart is stirred the mind sometimes forgets to be tactful. At length Jim spoke. 'Didn't I say that if we succeeded in reaching the ledge safely we should owe our lives to each other?'

'Oh, no,' cried Myra, impulsively. 'No, no, Jim Airth, you came down in great danger to save me. I owe you my life. You really owe me nothing.'

'I'm not accustomed to being corrected,' said Jim drily.

It was growing so dark they could only just see each other's faces. Lady Ingleby laughed. She was so unused to that kind of remark, she couldn't think of anything to reply.

'Well, I suppose I really owe my life to my red parasol,' she said. 'If that hadn't attracted your attention, you couldn't have seen me.'

'Should I not have seen you?' questioned Jim Airth, quietly, his eyes on the white loveliness of her face. 'Since I first saw you the afternoon of your arrival, you have never once come within my range of vision without my seeing you and taking in every detail.'

'On the afternoon when I arrived?' she said in astonishment.

‘Yes,’ he said, deliberately. ‘Seven o’clock, on the first of June, I stood looking out of the window; sick of myself, dissatisfied with my manuscript, tired of fried fish, don’t laugh; all the small and big things that go to make for depression. Then the gate swung back and you appeared. YOU, in capital letters, golden capitals. You came up the path with the sunlight in your eyes. Nothing has been the same since.’ Myra held her breath. ‘I thought to myself that you must be about my age, a woman of the world but just like a lovely child, with an unexpected holiday, full of surprises, stepping into fairyland.’ Jim Airth paused and sat silent. It was quite dark now. Myra slipped her hand into his which closed on it with a strong, unhesitating clasp.

‘Oh, Jim! Please go on.’ she said, softly.

‘I went into the hall and saw your name in the visitors book, the ink was still wet. The name surprised me agreeable. My fairyland princess was not, after all, a fashionable beauty or a society leader but had a simple Irish name and lived in a lodge. Then the name Shenstone interested me because I knew the Ingleby’s, at least I knew Lord Ingleby. I shall soon know Lady Ingleby of Shenstone because I have written to ask for an interview. I must see her on business connected with notes of her husband’s. If she gives me permission, the notes will be put somewhere in my book. I suppose you must know the Ingleby’s you live near?’

‘Yes,’ said Myra. ‘But, tell me, Jim, If, if you noticed so much on that first day, and, erm, were interested, why would you never look at me? Why weren’t you even as friendly and as nice to me as you were to Suzie, for instance?’

Jim Airth sat long, in silence, staring out into the darkness. At last he said; ‘I’ll tell you. Of course I must. I want to, but first I must ask you a few things.’

‘Ask me, Jim, ask me anything.’

Her cheek was so close to his jacket she might have rested against it by moving a little nearer. She did not move, however, but his hand clasped a little tighter.

‘Did you marry very young?’ he said. ‘I wasn’t quite eighteen. It’s ten years ago.’

‘Did you marry for love?’ There was a long silence.

Then Myra answered, speaking very slowly. ‘To be honest, I think I married chiefly to escape from an unhappy home. Also, I was very young and did not know anything at all. Nothing about life and nothing about love. And, I don’t know quite how to explain it, but I don’t think I have learnt much since.’

‘Have you been unhappy?’

‘Erm, not exactly unhappy. My husband was a very good man, kind and patient, but I often felt somehow I was missing the best in life. Well, now I know I was.’

‘How long have you been - - how long has he been dead?’ The deep voice was very tender so as not to cause any pain. ‘Seven months. He was killed at Targai.’

‘Targai?’ exclaimed Jim. ‘But I was there.’ His surprise betrayed his astonishment but he recovered himself at once. ‘Yes, of course, seven months. I was there, you know.’

Within himself, he was thinking rapidly. Sergeant O’Mara’s wife? Was it possible? This exquisite, refined woman, with the unmistakable hallmarks of perfect breeding?’

He knew the Sergeant was a good man, but, but, good Lord. Her husband. Well, there was no other O’Mara at Targai as far as he knew and there was some link between him and Lord Ingleby. Then, into his thoughts came Myra’s soft voice, from close beside him, in the darkness. ‘My husband was always good to me, but,’

Jim Airth laid his other hand over the one he held.

'I'm sure he was,' he said, gently. 'But if you had been older and known more about life and more of love, you would have done differently. Don't try to explain. I understand.'

Myra gladly left it at that. It would have been so difficult to explain further, anyway, without speaking about Michael and all that really mattered was that, with or without explanation, Jim Airth understood.

'And now, tell me,' she suggested, softly.

'Ah, yes,' he said, pulling himself together with an effort. 'Well, I missed, er, I missed the best too. I married at twenty-one and she was extremely beautiful but older. Nothing seemed to count or matter but how lovely she was. I thought I might be able to change her because she was not a good woman. But in the end, I couldn't. Even so it did not matter, I wanted her. I found out later she had laughed at me and found someone else to laugh with her. Two years later he came into some money and then she left me.' Jim Airth paused. The night was very black and in the dark they could hear the rhythmic pounding of the waves thundering monotonously against the cliff below. His voice came again, this time with pain. 'I divorced her, of course, and left the country. She had made hell of my life and wrecked all my ideals but before God I had taken her for my wife until death parted us. What could free me from that? I felt by going and staying in another hemisphere, I made her second marriage less sinful. I often felt like suicide during that time, but I outgrew that kind of morbidness. I began to realise that although love is good, life is the greatest gift of all and to throw it away, voluntarily, is unpardonable in a way.

It all covered ten years like yours, but I found work to do and then came the war and I went to Targai. It was an awful muddle of a war on the frontier and I got a heavy fever and connected you with widowhood until you said on the shore, 'I am a soldier's widow,' then I knew you were free.

Now you have heard all there is. I made a bad mistake at the beginning but I hope I am not was invalidated home. And here I am, finishing my book. Now, can you understand why a lovely woman fills me with a kind of panic. I had often told myself if I ever married again, it would have to be to a plain face. However, my fairyland Princess, from the moment you stepped out of the sunset, you walked up the garden path and right into my heart. Somehow, in you, YOU in golden capitals, I felt loveliness and a noble heart went together. So you see why I couldn't, well, couldn't cultivate your friendship, I never the sort of man you would mind sitting on a ledge with and calling 'Jim'.. In answer, Myra's cheek came trustfully to rest against his sleeve 'Jim,' she said, 'Oh, Jim'

Then suddenly she clasped both hands around the rough tweed coat. 'Jim,' she whispered, 'Not once have you said my name. It was a bargain. We were to be old and intimate friends. I seem to have been calling you Jim all my life but you have not once said 'Myra'. Please let me hear it.'

Jim Airth laid his big hands over both hers.

'I can't,' he said, 'Hush, I can't. Not up here. It means too much. Wait 'till we get back to earth again. Then, oh, dear. You will have to help me then.'

This kind of emotion was an unknown quantity to Lady Ingleby. So was the wild beating of her own heart.

The situation called for tact and it was her special gift. Talk about anything at all, she told herself.

'Jim, I wonder what the time is? Did you have a proper tea? I would be very hungry if I hadn't eaten so much before my walk. I wonder what variety of fish they had tonight. You looked so dismayed when Miss Suzannah choked over her fish bone. Do you remember? Is there any way of telling the time, did you say?'

'Yes, we can soon tell,' said Jim Airth, cheerfully. He dived into his pocket produced a matchbox and struck a light looking at his watch.

Myra saw the lean brown face in the weird light. She also saw the awful depth so close to them. A sense of dizziness came over her. She longed to cling to his arm but he had drawn it resolutely away. 'Half-past ten,' said Jim Airth. 'Miss Murgatroyd has donned her night cap. Miss Eliza has sighed, 'Good-night summer, good-night!' at her open window and Suzie has folded her plump little hands, saying

Now, I lay me down to sleep, I pray the lord my soul to keep.'

Myra laughed. 'They will be listening for you to dump your big boots when you come in!'

'No, really? Does it make a noise?'

'O, we love. I mean Suzie loves it,' she said. 'Please light your pipe, it doesn't make me sick or give me a headache or anything. No, I don't smoke, myself.'

Another match flared and again she saw the chasm and the nearness of the edge. She bore it for a moment until the pipe was lit. 'Oh, Jim,' she said, 'I'm so sorry, I feel very dizzy. I feel as though I am going to fall over, especially when you dangle your feet over the edge like that.'

He was instantly alert. 'Nonsense,' he said, but the sharp word sounded tender.

'Change your position a bit.' She gave a half sob. 'Now, forget the edge,' he said and listen. I will tell you about some of my travels, especially America and its wildness and the night will wear away quickly.'

As he spoke he put his arm round her and moved her so that she had her back to the cliff. The night wore on. Then he said, looking at her whiteness 'you ought to lie down, in fact, you *must* lie down.'

'No, Jim. I'm sorry,' said Myra, faintly, 'I can't move, the whole cliff is rocking. You seem to be miles away. I feel so weak suddenly.' She sobbed quietly. 'You are faint,' he said, 'now, there is nothing weak about you. It is my complete thoughtlessness.

But I can't have you fainting up here. Move a little way out, don't be afraid, I've got hold of you. Let me get behind you. That's right. Now, you are not touching the cliff. I'll get my shoulders firmly into the hollow and my feet fixed at the other end.

There, nothing short of an earthquake could dislodge me. Now, dear, turn your back to me and face the sea and let yourself go. You won't fall over. Don't be afraid.' And very gently, but very firmly, he drew her into his arms

Tired and frightened she was only conscious of intense relief. She seemed to have been fighting the cliff and resisting the darkness until she was utterly worn out. She yielded to his insistence and rested her cheek against his rough coat. It seemed more soothing than a soft pillow. With a great sigh she folded her hands across her breast and he laid one of his big ones over them both. She felt completely safe. Then she heard Jim Airth's voice close to her ear.

'We are not alone,' he said, 'You must try to sleep, dear; but first I want you to realise that we are not alone. Do you understand? God is here. When I was at school I was

'Thank God,' he said, his eyes on the morning star.

Chapter 9

Lady Ingleby opened her eyes to look down at a large brown hand covering hers. She lay quite still considering where her head was resting - the curve of a strong right arm was flung over and around her.

All questionings were resolved in two, short words, 'Jim Airth!' She lay very still, in case the deep spell of restfulness was broken. She hesitated in case the exquisite sense of heaven came down to earth.

As the dawn broke over the sea a wonderful, light dawned in her eyes with a radiance those sweet eyes had never known. 'Dear God,' she whispered, 'what wonder have you given me?' She gently withdrew one hand.

'Jim, Jim,' she said, 'look, it is day.' 'Oh, hello' Jim said, awakening quickly to the situation. 'Oh, Myra, I meant to keep awake. I must have slept. Are you all right? Let me help you up. I will have to move and we will have to get down as soon as possible. Doesn't it seem ages since I told you about Davy Jones? Are you hungry?'

Jim Airth talked quickly, laughing boyishly, stretching his arms above his head. 'What a morning! Isn't it great to be alive?' He wanted to make sure she didn't think too much about her situation.

Myra stole a look at him and although his eyes were turned seaward, she saw they had the same dawn-light as shone in her own. 'It's half-past three. Good. The sun's just rising. Isn't it wonderful. The Monarch of Day is coming.'

Myra laughed at his flowery language, loving it.

'Yes, I am hungry, Jim. What do we do now?'

'Well, are you ready for the climb down? Or I could go and get to the village and bring ropes and men and haul you up from the top.'

'No, no, I absolutely decline to be hauled up from the top, or to be left here alone.'

'Well,' said Jim Airth, 'the sooner we go the better. I am going first.' He was over the edge before Myra could speak or think again. 'Now, turn round. Hold onto the ledge - no, don't look down - give me your feet. Can you hear? Do exactly as I tell you.

Don't hesitate. It is less steep than yesterday. We are quite safe. Come on. That's right.'

Lady Ingleby passed through her most terrifying five minutes while she yielded in blind obedience to the strong hands beneath her and the big voice which encouraged and threatened alternatively. 'Our feet and hands will go into the same holes I dug out, do you hear?'

When the descent was finally over and she stood on the shore beside Jim Airth when together they turned and looked in silence at the rippling waters to the blazing beauty of the rising sun, thankful tears rushed to her eyes. 'Oh, Jim,' she exclaimed, 'God is so good! It is so wonderful to be alive!'

Jim Airth turned his face toward her, the sunlight in his eyes, his face transfigured. 'Myra,' he said softly, 'we did not say goodnight so we have no need to say good morning. How ideal it would be never to have to say either to each other ever again. All life would be one wonderful good. better, best. Do you think we have found the very best in life?'

Then Jim Airth opened to her his arms.

They walked along the shore and up the steep street of the sleeping village, hand in hand like happy children.

Pushing open the garden gate at the Moorhead Inn they stepped noiselessly across the sunlit lawn. The front door was firmly bolted.

Jim Airth slipped round the back but returned in a minute shaking his head. He felt in his pocket for the big knife which had served them so well, pushed back the catch on the coffee-room window and softly raised the sash. He swung one leg over and drew Myra in after him.

Once in the familiar room set for breakfast they both collapsed into fits of uncontrollable laughter, the more overwhelming as it had to be silent. Jim recovered first and went to the larder to forage for food.

Myra flew noiselessly to her room to wash and smooth her hair. She returned in two minutes to find Jim, very proud of his success, setting out a crusty home-made loaf, a large cheese and two tankards of ale.

Lady Ingleby longed for tea and had never in her life drunk ale out of a pewter pot but would not have spoiled Jim Airth's delight in his success for the world.

So they sat at the centre table. Myra in Miss Murgatroyd's place and Jim in Suzie's, and ate their bread and cheese and drank their beer with huge appetites and great enjoyment. Jim pretended to be sentimental over Suzannah's napkin and Myra reproved him in Miss Murgatroyd's voice then linked hands to make a wish having both spoken together but neither could think of one. By the time they had finished and cleared away it was five-thirty. They passed into the hall together.

'You must get some more sleep,' said Jim Airth, authoritatively. 'I certainly will if you wish, but I never felt so strong or so rested,' whispered Myra. 'Jim, I shall sit at your table for breakfast and pour your coffee. It will be fun to watch the Miss Murgatroyds and remember the cheese and beer. If you are down first, will you order breakfast at the same table?' 'Certainly,' said Jim.

Myra started mounting but turned on the fifth step and looked down over the bannisters to smile at him. Jim Airth reached up his hand. 'How can I let you go,' he said, suddenly.

Myra leaned over and smiled into his adoring eyes.

'How can I go?' she whispered. Jim Airth took both her hands in his, 'Myra, he said, when shall we be married?'

Myra's face flushed just like the soft blush on the clouds when the sun rose but she met the fire in his eyes without flinching. 'Whenever you like, Jim' she answered, gently. 'As soon as possible, then,' he said, eagerly, 'I don't know how to bear a day or an hour away from you.'

'Ah, yes, dear Jim,' she said, 'I am afraid I feel the same.'

'Myra!' cried Jim Airth. 'Do you really? Come back.'

But Lady Ingleby had fled up the stairs. She had not run so fast since she was a child of ten. He heard her happy laugh as she closed the door, gently. Then he unbarred the front door, stepped into the sunshine on the path where he had seen his fairyland Princess arrive. He stretched his arms over his head exultantly. 'She's mine. Altogether mine. Oh God, I thank you for one of the very best.' Then he raced down the street to the beach and five minutes later he flung himself into the water in all his vigorous manhood and swam towards the rising sun.

The week which followed was one of ideal joy and holiday. Both knew, instinctively, that no after days could ever be quite the same. It was an experience that would not come again. It must be thoroughly enjoyed with absolute completeness. At first, Jim Airth talked of a special licence and pleaded for no delay but Myra felt it would be doubtful if she could marry under an assumed name. Although she could have solved the difficulty immediately by revealing her identity to Jim, she was anxious to choose her own time and place for such a revelation and had set her heart on making it in the surroundings of her own beautiful home.

'I have friends Jim in town and at Shenstone,' she urged, 'who take an interest in my doings and I could hardly appear among them actually married. Could I, Jim? It would seem a strange end to a rest cure.'

Jim's big laugh brought Miss Suzie to her window once again as it overlooked the honeysuckle arbour.

'It might make quite a run on rest cures,' said Jim Airth.

'Well, they couldn't all meet you,' said Myra.

So they agreed to have one week of this free, untrammelled life before returning to those who knew them. He promised to come and see her in her own home before taking the final steps which would make them belong to each other.

So they took happy walks together and Myra clung to his arm looking down on their ledge and visiting the Horseshoe Cove. Jim spent hours cutting proper steps so as to leave a staircase to the ledge for people who might be caught by the tide. Myra sat on the beach watching him, her eyes alight with tender memories, but absolutely refusing to try them. They hired a tent and pitched it on the shore, Myra buying a bathing dress and Jim trying to teach her to swim, holding up her chin and saying, 'one, two, one, two.' With much splashing and laughter, Myra eventually accomplished ten yards.

Miss Murgatroyd, senior, was shocked. More than shocked, scandalised and took to her bed, expecting her sisters to follow her example. But released from Amelia's personal supervision, romantic Miss Suzannah led Miss Eliza astray. The two took furtive and fearful joy in seeing all they could of the goings on of the couple who had boldly converted the down-to-earth Cornish hotel into a land of excitement and romance.

From the moment Myra had swept into the coffee-room at breakfast time, with yellow roses in the belt of her white gown, all life had seemed transformed to Miss Suzie. Turning quickly she had caught the look Jim Airth gave to the lovely woman who took her place opposite him at his otherwise lonely table, and still smiling into his eyes, lifted the coffee-

pot. Amelia's stern whisper had recalled her to her senses and prevented any further turning round. But she did hear Myra saying 'One lump or two, Jim', and Jim Airth's reply, 'As usual, dear,' although she did not know he had placed his hand firmly over the cup as a sign to Myra that 'as usual' meant no sugar at all.

Later on, when she met Lady Ingleby in the passage, Miss Suzannah ventured to ask, 'Please tell me, my dear, is it really true that you are going to marry Mr. Airth? Have you known him long?' Myra smiled into Suzie's plump anxious face and replied, 'Well, as a matter of fact, Miss Suzannah, Jim Airth is going to marry *me*. And I seem to have known him all my life.'

In the consciousness of her own great happiness, Myra enveloped little Suzie in her beautiful arms and kissed her. Miss Suzannah never forgot that embrace and thereafter, whenever Miss Murgatroyd used words like 'highly improper' or 'indecent', Miss Suzie bravely took absolutely no notice.

So the golden days went by during which Jim Airth went steadily on with his book, Myra sitting near him writing letters or reading. 'I do better work if you are near,' he said. It was impossible that Myra shouldn't be tempted to contrast the pleasure that that gave her with the way she had felt when shut out from the chief interests of Michael's life. If work had to be done she had always been in the way. Jim already made her feel part of himself. A letter came from Lady Ingleby's secretary. Her ladyship was away at present but would be returning to Shenstone on the following Monday and would be pleased to give him an interview on Tuesday afternoon. The two o'clock express from Charing Cross would be met at Shenstone Station unless he wrote suggesting another.

'Now that is very kind,' said Jim to Myra, as he passed her the letter. 'That will fit in with our plans. I shall get my interview with Lady Ingleby over as quickly as possible and dash off to my girl at the Lodge.'

It was then that Jim suddenly asked, 'By the way, do you know a little about Lady Ingleby? Is she easy to talk to? Does she speak of her husband's death? I have to talk about these inventions of his. Do you think she would like to hear details of his last days?'

'Possibly,' said Myra. 'Jim do you know who was responsible?'

A surprised silence in the arbour where they sat after supper, followed. Jim removed his pipe and looked at her. 'Do I know what?' he asked, eventually.

'Er, well, that is to say, do you know the name of the man who made the mistake which killed Lord Ingleby?'

Jim returned his pipe to his mouth in silence.

Eventually he said, 'Yes, dear, I do. But how do you come to know about the blunder? I thought the whole thing was a secret with the war Office for the time being.'

'Yes, yes, it was,' said Myra. 'But Lady Ingleby was told and I knew then. Jim, if she asked you the name, would you tell her?'

'Of course, I never thought it right to hush it up. But evidently they thought the man's reputation would be at stake. And the world never lets that sort of thing drop. He would always be pointed out as the man who killed Ingleby as though it was done on purpose.

Then we heard Lady Ingleby had decided she did not want to know anyway, poor loyal soul. I think she must be a very just-minded woman but it would be like a woman to make a good decision like that in the tension of the moment and then indulge in private speculation afterwards.' 'Did you know her reason, Jim?' asked Myra. 'She said she always wanted to be able to shake every man's hand without blame, and in clear friendship.'

Jim Airth was deeply moved.

‘Myra, if I got done for like that, would you feel like that for my sake?’

‘Jim, Jim, no’ cried Myra, passionately. ‘I, if I lost you, beloved man, I would never want to touch any other man’s hand, in friendship or not.’

Myra laid her beautiful hand on Jim’s, ‘Jim, dear, I never realised what love meant until I knew you.’

There was a long silence in the honeysuckle arbour. Then Jim said fiercely to the woman he took in his arms, ‘Can you really think you have been right to keep me waiting, even for a day?’ She who loved him beyond expression, couldn’t think of an answer at that moment but in days to come the question returned again and again, ‘Was I right to keep him waiting, even for a day?’

Sunday evening, their last at Tregarth, came all too soon. They went to the little church together, sitting with the fishermen and their wives at Evensong. As they shared one hymn book and sang ‘Eternal Father, strong to save,’ they both thought of Davy Jones in the middle and smiled at each other. But this all meant an imminent parting and there had been tense moments in the arbour. Jim’s eyes were mutinous. He stood in the hall where they were to say goodnight and held her hands against his breast as he had done in Horseshoe cove when the waves swept around their feet and had said, ‘You must climb.’ From the first Myra had never allowed him up the stairs until her door had been closed for five minutes.

‘If you don’t keep the rules I think it right to make, Jim Airth,’ she had said with a tender little smile, ‘I shall engage Miss Murgatroyd as a chaperone.’

So Jim remained below and then tramped noisily up the stairs plonking his boots down heartily with a great bang to the door, whistling ‘Davy Jones’ as loudly as he could, causing a great deal of giggling between the two youngest Miss Murgatroyds. But now Myra smiled into his angry eyes. ‘So, tomorrow night,’ he said, ‘you will be at the Lodge and I shall be at my club in town. Do you know how hard it is to be away from you, even for an hour? Do you realise that if you had not been so obstinate we should not have to be parted at all? If you had really cared, we could have gone away from here as husband and wife.’

‘Really cared?’ she whispered, ‘Oh, Jim, you know perfectly well, I care for you more than any woman in the world has ever cared for any man before. But I do assure you, Jim dear, I could not have married you validly from here. When you come to my home and fetch me away from there, you will admit I am right and have to humbly apologise for saying ‘Rubbish’ so often. Jim, dearest, I must go. Poor Miss Suzannah will have grown tired waiting for us. Did you know that they have taken with sleeping with their doors ajar and listening for the boots? Jim, say goodnight quickly and let me go.’

‘Once,’ said Jim Airth, tightening his grip on Myra’s wrists, ‘once, Myra, we said no goodnight and no good-morning.’

‘Jim, darling!’ said Myra, gently, ‘on that night, before I went to sleep, you said to me, ‘We are not alone, God is here. And you said some of the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm. I felt I could trust you with my whole life, I could trust you as I trusted God.’

Jim Airth loosed the hands he had held so tightly and kissed them gently. ‘Goodnight, sweet one,’ he said, ‘and God bless you.’ It was like a benediction on the golden head. He turned away to the marble hall table. Myra ran swiftly up the stairs and shut her door.

Then she knelt by her bed and sobbed uncontrollably, partly for joy, partly for sorrow. The unanswered question began to return. 'Am I right to keep him waiting?' In a moment she lifted her head and stared into the darkness. A tall, bearded man seemed to pass through the room like a vision. He had a tiny dog in his arms, peeping at her through its curls, as if to say, 'I have the best place, where do you come in?' The tall man turned. 'Goodnight, my dear Myra,' he said, kindly. Then the vision passed.. Lady Ingleby buried her face in the bedclothes. 'Oh, dear God, was it for ten years?' Then, in the darkness, she saw the mutinous face of Jim Airth and the fire in his blue eyes and felt the strong grip of his hands on hers. 'How can I say goodnight', protested his voice passionately. And with a rush of happy tears, Myra clasped her hands, whispering, 'Dear God, will I really know what love is at last?'

Up the stairs came Jim Airth, whistling like a blackbird, but in deference to the Miss Murgatroyds' ideas concerning suitable Sunday music he discarded Davy Jones, for

'Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm has bound the restless wave;
Who bids the mighty ocean deep,
Its own appointed limits keep,
O hear us, when we cry to Thee - - -'

And, kneeling beside her bed, Myra made it her evening prayer.

Chapter 10

When Jim Airth left the train the following Tuesday afternoon, he looked eagerly up and down the platform, hoping to see Myra. True, they had particularly arranged not to meet until after his interview with Lady Ingleby. However, Myra was so charmingly impulsive in her actions it would be quite like her to change the whole plan and, in their need for one another, he would easily understand it. However, she was not there and with a heavy sense of disappointment, he gave his ticket up, passed through the station and found a smartly dressed groom waiting with a cart and two ponies.

The groom touched his hat. 'For Shenstone Park, sir?' 'Yes,' said Jim, shortly. The groom gathered the reins, flicked the leader and the perfectly matched pair swung into a fast trot.

Jim Airth eyed them with approval. He was a connoisseur of horse flesh. They flew along the narrow Surrey lanes, between masses of wild roses and clematis. It was a matchless June day in a perfect English summer. Jim Airth's disappointment lifted rapidly. After all, every step of these little tapping hooves brought him nearer to the Lodge and it was better to stick to plans once made, he thought. 'These ponies have been well-handled,' he remarked to the groom, as they flew round a bend. 'Yes, sir,' said the groom, 'her ladyship always drives them herself. A very fine horse-woman, her ladyship, sir.' This item of information surprised Jim. Judging by Lord Ingleby's age and appearance, he had expected to find Lady Ingleby a sedate, stately matron of sixty.

However, he had no time to weigh the matter. Passing an ivy-clad church on the village green they swung through massive iron gates and entered the stately avenue of Shenstone Park. To the left in a group of trees, stood a pretty gabled house.

‘What house is that?’ asked Jim, quickly. ‘That’s the Lodge, sir.’

A neatly dressed woman in black, apparently a superior lady’s maid, appeared on the doorstep, shook out a white tablecloth and re-entered the house. The Lodge was smaller than Jim Airth had expected but he smiled to himself at some thought that apparently gave him pleasure. Jim noted every tree with appreciation and a moment later the fine old house came into view.

‘Good driving,’ remarked Jim Airth, approvingly, as he tipped the groom. Then he turned to find the great doors standing wide and a stately butler with immense black eyebrows, waiting to receive him.

‘Would you wait in her ladyship’s sitting-room, Mr. Airth,’ said the butler leading the way.

‘Kindly wait here, sir, and I will tell her ladyship you have arrived,’ he said, pompously. He went out noiselessly, leaving Jim alone. Jim Airth took a rapid look around to gain some slight knowledge of the tastes and character of the owner. Almost immediately his attention was caught by the impressive portrait of Lord Ingleby. He gazed with silent intensity for a long time. ‘Excellent,’ he said to himself. ‘Very clever, whoever did it. He will paint Myra for me if I can find him. What devotion of the dog. Mutual and all-absorbing. I suppose that is Peter. I wonder whether Lady Ingleby likes him. I doubt whether she had a look in when the dog was around.’

He was still absorbed in the picture when the butler returned to deliver his message.

‘Her ladyship is in the grounds, sir. As it is so warm, she requests you to come to her there. If you will allow me, I’ll show you the way.’

Jim Airth followed him meekly, restraining the inclination to say, ‘Buck up, man, I’ve been here ten minutes.’

Beyond the terrace and the smooth lawn, sloping down to a beautiful lake, sparkling in the afternoon sunshine, stood a group of beech trees. Beneath their spreading boughs, in the cool, inviting shadow, were some garden chairs and Jim Airth could just discern in one of these, the white gown of a woman holding a scarlet parasol. The scarlet parasol made Jim’s heart beat but he was conscious of the butler’s dark eyebrows indicating the trees.

‘Her ladyship said, sir, that she would await you under the beeches.’ And Jim was left to make his own way alone, guided by the gleam of the brilliant parasol. Even at that moment, it gave him pleasure to find Lady Ingleby’s tastes resembling Myra’s. He stood for a moment taking in the matchless beauty of the place. Then his face grew stern and sad. ‘Poor Lord Ingleby, what a home to leave and never to return.,’

He felt subdued as he stepped past the flower garden onto the soft turf of the lawn and walked toward the clump of beech trees.

Jim Airth, tall and soldierly, broad shouldered and erect, might have made a distinct impression of Lady Ingleby had she watched his coming. But she kept her parasol between herself and her approaching guest. He drew quite near enough to see the soft lace about her feet and the long graceful sweep of gown but she seemed quite unconscious of his closeness.

'Lady Ingleby,' he ventured, 'I was told to - - '

Then the parasol was flung aside and he found himself looking down into the lovely, laughing eyes of Myra.

To see Jim Airth's face change from formal gravity to rapturous delight was worth the long effort of sitting immovable.

He flung himself down with boyish abandon and clasped both herself and the chair in his long arms. 'Oh, you darling!' he said, bending his face over her while his blue eyes danced with delight. 'Oh, Myra, what centuries since yesterday. How I have longed to see you. I almost hoped you would come to the station after all. I grudge this time calling on old Lady Ingleby. Has it seemed so long to you, dear? Do you realise that I can't possibly go on any longer. I can't live through another twenty-four hours without you. Myra, you tease! There you were hiding your face, pretending to be Lady Ingleby. The astonishing man with the eyebrows certainly pointed you out as Lady Ingleby. How lovely you look. All billowing softness. It certainly wouldn't do for climbing cliffs.'

'Jim, Jim, said Myra, laughing and pushing him off a bit. You will really have to behave. This is not the honeysuckle arbour. The astonishing eyebrows are probably raised a bit more observing us from the window. Jim, you do look nice in your town clothes. Did you don all this finery for me?'

'No, I certainly did not. When I haul you up cliffs I wear old coats and when I duck you in the sea I wear old flannels.' Jim brushed his knees vigorously. 'This is for Lady Ingleby. She won't be duly impressed by green turf on my knees, either. Where is she, by the way? Why doesn't she keep her appointments?'

'Jim,' said Myra, her eyes full of love but dancing with excitement and delight, 'Jim, do you like this place?'

'It's perfect,' said Jim, stepping back to look at the lake and the woods. 'Absolutely perfect. We have nothing like this in Scotland. I suppose it all belongs to the Ingleby's or rather Lady Ingleby. What a pity there is no son and heir.'

'Jim,' said Myra, slowly, 'I have so looked forward to showing you my home.'

'Then show it to me, dear,' he said. 'I would rather be alone with you in your own little home. I saw it as we drove up, than waiting about in this vast expanse of beauty.'

Myra came and stood before him, laying her hands on his breast. He wrapped his arms lightly round her. He saw she had something to say so he waited, curbing his slight

impatience for his long awaited interview. 'Jim,' said Myra, 'Jim, dearest. There is just one name I want to bear and one thing I long to be then I shall be content. I want the right to be called Mrs. Jim Airth. I want more than all else to be your wife. But,' here Myra hesitated. 'But, if you were a cowboy, Jim, and you loved a woman who had lands and houses, in taking her, I believe, you would take all that was hers, too wouldn't you?'

'Well,' said Jim, 'that's the wrong way round, the man bestows all his goods on the lass.'

'No, no,' said Myra, eagerly, 'there is no wrong way round when two people love each other.' 'Well,' said Jim, 'I'd probably take her out to my ranch and teach her to milk cows.'

'Jim,' said Myra, carefully and slowly, 'I am very serious. I want more than all else to be your wife, but until that time, and may it be very soon, until you make me Mrs. Jim Airth, dearest, I am Lady Ingleby.'

There was a silence under the beech trees. Jim Airth's arms fell slowly to his sides. He still looked into those loving, happy eyes, but the joy in his own died out. His face slowly whitened and froze into hard lines. He moved back a step. 'You, you are Lady Ingleby, you mean Lord Ingleby's wife?'

Myra gazed at him in unspeakable dismay. 'Jim, Jim why so distressed? Why should you mind so much?'

She moved forward to take his hand but he sank down into a chair and put his head in his hands. Then he said, brokenly, 'You, Myra? You are Lord Ingleby's widow? It can't be.'

'Let's talk it over, Jim. I don't think you need find it so overwhelming.' Without further comment she moved her chair nearer and waited. Without lifting his head, Jim said, 'Who then, is Mrs. O'Mara?'

'She is the widow of sergeant O'Mara. We both lost our husbands at Targai. Jim, can I explain? If I could hold your hand it would be easier, no? Very well, never mind. She was my maid and she lives in the lodge. I wanted her near me and she wanted to stay.' Myra laid her hand on his knee but might have been a fallen leaf for all the notice he took. 'But,' she continued, leaving her hand there, 'Jim, after I heard the news, I'm afraid I had a bad nervous breakdown. I know it was partly caused by the loss but also from the prolonged mental strain of having to face the fact that it may have been one of my dear friends who made the mistake which killed Michael. Oh, don't groan, darling, you make me so unhappy. Oh, Jim, try to understand. There were so many people gossiping, and I was so alone. There seemed to be so many men wanting to make my acquaintance. I never allowed anyone to get anywhere near proposing, but it all became impossible. Sir Deryck Brand, you may know him, he is a specialist in that kind of thing and he advised me to go right away, to leave my own identity and all responsibility and go somewhere I had never heard of before. I followed his advice to the letter, to live in the open air, rise early, go to bed early, live as simply as possible and above all, 'leave Lady Ingleby behind,' he said. You were quite right, Jim. When I arrived I felt as happy as a child.'

Myra paused, controlling her emotions. Then, leaning forward, laid her lips on the roughness of his hair. It might have been the stirring of the breeze for all the sign he made.

'And then - I saw you. I was on holiday all the time, entering a new world of beauty and delight I know, but the first moment I saw you, my soul flew to you. Jim, you may not believe this but all your vitality became a fresh source of strength to me. It changed everything that was so weak and faltering in me. I owed you so much even before we spoke together at all, afterwards I owed you life itself, and love, and, Jim, everything.'

She faltered, waiting, then, quieter, she spoke slowly. 'I was very thankful for the doctor's advice to leave my title behind when you told me how you hated them. And also you might have known Michael. I resolved not to tell you who I was unless you loved enough not to mind it. Or wanted me enough to make me just plain Mrs. Jim Airth. Now, you will understand why we could not be married in Cornwall with the wrong name. Was it selfish? Oh, dear, can't our love stand such a light thing as this?'

She ceased to speak and waited. She was sure of her victory but not quite sure why it was causing him such distress. She was deeply hurt but she was a woman and she loved him.

She waited patiently to see his love rise above his hurt pride. With so fine a nature as his, why had she had to fight so hard over such a paltry matter?

At last Jim Airth stood up.

'I can't face it yet,' he said slowly. 'I must be alone. I ought to have known from the very first that you were Lady Ingleby. I am very sorry you should have to suffer for something that is no fault of your own. I must go now. I will come back in twenty-four hours to talk it over.'

He turned without another word, without a touch or even a look. He swung round on his heel and walked swiftly across the lawn. Myra's dismayed eyes could scarcely follow him. He mounted the terrace and passed into the house. A door closed. Jim Airth was gone.

Chapter 11

Myra Ingleby rose and walked slowly towards the house. No-one would notice there was anything wrong but the heart within her was dying. Her joy had received a mortal wound. The man she adored was slowly slipping from his pedestal and she was powerless to keep him there. She had called him a cowboy and of course knew him to be cosmopolitan but did he really scorn noble birth and other people's rightful titles? Did he really set such an exaggerated value on them?

She entered the house and crossing to the sitting-room, gazed up at the picture of Lord Ingleby. The gentle, scholarly face reminded her of his unfailing friendliness to all and his courteous manner to rich and poor alike.

'Oh, Michael,' she whispered, 'have I been unfaithful and forgotten how good you were?' But still her heart died within her. The man who had stalked across the lawn, leaving her without a look, held it in the palm of his hand. She heard horses clattering on the patio. Then Billy's excited voice cried, 'May we come in?'

The next moment she was grasping a hand each of Ronald and Billy.

'You dear boys,' she managed, 'I've never been more glad to see you. Have you come to play tennis?'

'We have come to see you, dear Queen, we are staying at Overdene and the Duchess had your letter to say you had returned. She told us the great news.

We've come to er to' 'Congratulate you,' said Ronald Ingram, as heartily as he could. 'Thank you,' said Myra, smiling at them. Her sweet voice shook a little.

Congratulations just now were almost more than she could bear. Then with characteristic straightforwardness, she told these old friends the truth, 'It's, it's very good of you to come over. An hour ago you would have found me very happy.'

She hesitated, knowing quite well their more than friendly feelings toward her were held in check but now was the time to confide in someone.

'I was doing my very original rest cure when I met him, which chiefly meant I was being Mrs. O'Mara instead of myself. This afternoon he knows for the first time I am Lady Ingleby of Shenstone. The shock has been too much for him. He is a wonderful man, a sort of cowboy person and his life has been abroad a lot. You must have met him in Targai. He says he was there in that muddle, as he called it. He had to come home with

a bad fever and he is writing a book about it all. But he told me he has quite an eccentric dislike to titles and big properties, so as soon as I told him, he said he would have to go off and think about it. I don't know what to do now,' Myra finished, lamely. Billy looked at Ronnie. 'Is it him? Shall we tell her?' Ronnie said, 'well, it must be. 'You tell her.' Lady Ingleby became aware of them both. 'What is it? What will you tell me?' 'Dear Queen,' said Billy, with hardly suppressed excitement, 'may we ask your cowboy's name?

'Jim Airth,' replied Myra, with a sudden rush of colour flooding her pale cheeks. 'In that case,' said Billy, 'he is the chap we met tearing along to the railway station as if all the furies were loose at his heels. We had to ride on the path and he didn't seem to hear us shouting hello or recognize his two old friends. But he cannot possibly have been fleeing from your tittle, dear lady, and certainly not from your property. His own title is one of the finest in Scotland and certainly one of the oldest. Mile after mile of moor and stream and forest belong to him. Surely you knew that the fellow who calls himself Jim Airth is James, Earl of Airth and Monteith, and a few other names I've forgotten.'

With as much calm self-control that she could find within herself after a few moments silence, Myra, Lady Ingleby, said, 'Did you bring your tennis rackets? It's a long time since I saw you two fight it out on the chestnut court. Do start, I'll order tea for about half an hour's time and follow you.' Then she escaped to the terrace, flew across the lawn and sought the shelter of the beeches. She sank into her garden chair and covered her face.

'Oh, Jim, Jim!' she sobbed. 'I've misjudged you horribly. You would never think thoughts like that. But why go? What do you have to face? Whatever is it that has come between us? Oh, Jim, come back, please.'

Myra pondered and wept, reasoned around in a circle, growing more and more bewildered and perplexed.

'If you could take a simple name like Jim Airth, why couldn't I do the same? I don't think I can live without you, if you leave me now.'

By and by she went upstairs to remove all traces of the tears. Ronald and Billy would be expecting her to join them. There were brave attempts at merriment during tea.

Ronald told all the latest Overdene stories, including the one about the Duchess and old Pilberry the parson and the Duchesses' loved parrot, in spite of Billy telling him to shut up, everyone had heard that a dozen times.

Billy described the latest annual concert and Garth Dalmain's new song.

'Jane sings her husband's songs, you know. It's wonderful to see the light on his blind face as he listens. Very few people realise he is blind when he gets up from the piano, looks toward her and takes her arm and apparently leads her off the stage. She sang an air like a summer wind blowing through a pine wood with an accompaniment like a blackbird whistling. Something about 'On God's fair earth, mid blossoms blue. I forget the rest. Go ahead, Ronnie!'

'There is no room for sad despair,
When heaven's love is everywhere.' quoted Ronald.

Myra rose, hastily, 'I must go in,' she said, 'but go on playing as long as you like.'
Billy walked beside her toward the shrubbery. 'Could I come in, in a minute to see you, dear? There is something I want to tell you.'
'Come whenever you like, Billy-boy' said Lady Ingleby, with a smile. 'You'll find me in the sitting-room.'

Billy looked furtively at Ronald, hoping the maternal look he had been given hadn't been seen by his friend and rival. But it was a very grave-faced young man who appeared in the sitting-room, closing the door carefully behind him.

Lady Ingleby knew at once he had something important to say. Billy's days of youthful escapades were over. She hoped devoutly he was not going to propose. Billy's eyes, roaming the room anxiously for inspiration alighted on the portrait over the matelpee. He started and then paled slightly.

'Sit down, Billy,' said Myra, indicating Lord Ingleby's chair. It was also little Peter's chair. Both had now left it empty. Billy filled it readily, unconscious of its associations. 'Lovely flowers,' he said.

'Yes,' said Myra.

'I like this room very much.'

'Yes, so do I,' said Lady Ingleby.

There must be no more beating about the bush. Billy knew his hour had come. Billy was a soldier and a brave one. He had led his men once in a charge running up a hill ahead in a hail of bullets. First came Billy, then the battalion. He rushed at the subject now with the same headlong courage.

'Lady Ingleby,' he said, 'there is something Ronnie and I both think you ought to know.'

'Is there, Billy?' Myra said, carefully, 'then suppose you tell me what it is.'

'There is something we were not to speak of, but now we are only concerned with your happiness.'

'I see, well, even for my sake, are you sure you ought to tell me?'

'The point is, that if you wished to be told, you were the one exception.' Lady Ingleby suddenly understood. 'Billy, does Ronald really wish me to be told as well?'

This gave Billy a pang. So Ronnie really counted after all and would walk in, over the broken hearts of Billy and another, in the role of manly comforter. It was hard but loyal Billy did not answer. 'Yes,' he said, at last, 'Ronnie says it is the right thing to do. I have come to do it, if you agree.'

Lady Ingleby sat with clasped hands. After all, what did it matter? What did anything matter compared with the trouble with Jim?

She looked up at the portrait, but Michael's face, gazing at little Peter, gave no sign. If these boys wished to tell her and get it off their minds, why should she not know? It would put a stop to both their tragic but amorous advances toward her. 'Yes, Billy,' she said, at last. 'You may as well tell me.' The room was very still. A rosebud tapped against the window-pane. It might have been a warning finger. Neither noticed it. Then he spoke. 'The man who made the mistake,' he said, 'and fired the mine too soon; only a fraction too quickly; the man who killed Lord Ingleby by mistake I say, Myra, dear, a total mistake, was the man you call Jim Airth.'

Chapter 12

Lady Ingleby awaited Jim Airth's arrival, sitting quietly in her sitting-room. She had resumed the mourning, temporarily laid aside. The black gown, trailing about her in soft folds, added to the graceful height of her slight figure. The white tokens of widowhood at neck and wrist gave to her unusual beauty a pathetic suggestion of wistful loneliness. Her face was very pale, the tired eyes showed tears and sleeplessness. But the calm steadfast look revealed a mind now completely at rest. She leaned back and waited.

Bees hummed in and out of the open windows. The scent of freesias filled the room, piercingly sweet. To one man forever afterwards the scent of freesias recalled that afternoon, the exquisite sweetness of that lovely face and the trailing softness of her widow's gown. There were steps in the hall. Groatley's voice, pompous as ever, broke the waiting silence.

'The Earl of Airth,' said he, 'is here, madam,' and Jim walked in. As the door closed behind him Myra rose. They stood silently gazing at one another beneath Lord Ingleby's picture. It almost seemed as though the thoughtful, scholarly face must turn from contemplation of the little dog to look down for a moment. It might have proved an interesting psychological study if any of them had been objective enough. But the two below faced one another for the space of a dozen heartbeats. Then Myra, with a swift movement put her arms about his neck. 'I know, my beloved Jim, I know, so you need not give yourself the pain of trying to tell me.'

'How?' The single syllable was all he could manage.

'Billy told me. Yesterday. He and Ronald Ingram came over soon after you left. You passed them in the drive. They thought I ought to know.' Jim Airth's arms closed around her, holding her tightly. 'You, you poor girl,' he said, brokenly.

'I'm ready now, Jim. I'm glad they told me. I'm quite ready.' Jim Airth laid his cheek on her soft hair with a groan. 'I've come to say goodbye, dear. It is all that is left to be said.' 'Good bye?' Myra raised her terrified eyes. 'Goodbye?'

'Myra. I am the man whose hand did it. The hand,' he said, slowly, 'the hand you could never touch without remembering.' Myra lifted her head again. She was prepared to fight.

'You are the man whose little finger is dearer to me than anyone else's whole body. Do you think I would give you up because of an accident in the past? Oh, dear, how little you men understand women. When Billy told me, my first thought, after the shock, was how appalling the mental anguish must have been for you. And then, at last, I knew nothing could now come between us. The ghost, because that is what it is, need never divide us. Jim slowly unlocked his arms, took her by the wrists, holding her hands against his breast, in the typical way she loved. Then he looked into her eyes with silent sadness, more forcible than speech.

'My dear Myra,' he said, at length, 'It is impossible for me to marry Lord Ingleby's widow.'

Myra felt the strength of his will as she had in Horseshoe Cove when his courage had overcome her fears. But now she felt her confidence ebbing away before his stern face. Fearful of losing it altogether she withdrew her hands and sat down, turning to bury her face in a great bowl of roses.

She could not meet the settled sadness in his eyes again, not at this moment. Jim sat opposite to her.

‘Listen, dear,’ he said. ‘I need not ask you to doubt my love. That would be absurd from you to me. I love you as I never thought it possible for a man to love a woman. Every fibre in me hungers for you, night and day, and always will. But to stand in a dead man’s shoes when he is dead through an act of mine, to take to myself another man’s widow when she would still be a wife but for a reckless movement of mine. Myra, how can I do it? Even with our great love, it wouldn’t mean happiness. Think of it. Standing in the church and they ask if there is any impediment why we may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony. I should have to cry, ‘I killed her husband.’ I would have the brand of Cain on me or that terrible deed of David’s when he killed Bathsheba’s husband. Oh, Myra, if I managed that ordeal, what happens when the church bids me take your right hand in my right hand, Myra. My right hand?’

Myra lifted her frightened eyes and met his beseechingly. She took his right hand and covered it with tears and kisses, kneeling before him, suddenly.

‘Dearest,’ she said, ‘isn’t there another side to the picture? Doesn’t it strike you that it seems beautiful to find that God in His wonderful way has put you in a position to take care of Michael’s widow? You saved my life by the strength of your right hand didn’t you? didn’t you? so you have atoned for another man’s death. I know perhaps the past can’t be undone but it sometimes can be wiped out by the present. Oh, Jim. Don’t let’s part. Not forever. I can come away with you now, at once. We can get a special licence and be married immediately. We will leave Shenstone and live abroad, anywhere, anywhere you want, Jim. Only let’s be together. I can’t face life without you, Jim. I can’t. God knows I can’t.’

Jim Airth looked up, a gleam of hope in his eyes. Then he looked away, that her appealing loveliness might not tempt him while making his decision. He lifted his eyes and alas, they fell on the portrait over the mantelpiece. He shivered, ‘I can never marry Lord Ingleby’s widow.’ He looked at her again. ‘Myra, how can you wish it. The thing would haunt us. It would be unnatural. Night and day it would come between us. Some day you would reproach me.’

‘Please, hush,’ said Myra, sharply, ‘don’t ever say that. I’ve enough to suffer without that kind of talk.’

Then, once more, with great effort, she put aside her own pain. ‘Jim, wouldn’t it really be happiness to you?’ she asked with a wistful gentleness.

‘Happiness?’ cried Jim Airth, violently. ‘It would be hell.’

Lady Ingleby rose, her face white.

‘Then that settles it,’ she said. ‘Do you know, I think we better not speak of it any more. I will ring for tea. If you will excuse me one moment I will look for the papers in my husband’s things that you require for your book.’

She passed swiftly out. He crossed the room in two great strides to follow her then paused at the door and turned slowly back. He stood on the heartthrob motionless. Then lifted his eyes to the portrait. 'Curse you,' he said, violently, through clenched teeth, beating his fists on the mantelpiece. 'Curse your explosives and curse your inventions, and curse you for taking her first.'

Then Jim Airth dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands. 'Oh, God forgive me but there is a limit to how much a man can bear.'

He scarcely noticed the entrance of the footman bringing the tea. But when a light step paused at the door, he lifted a haggard face, expecting to see Myra.

A woman entered, simply dressed in black, coming into the room with a quiet dignity. 'I've come to pour your tea, my lord,' she said, 'Lady Ingleby is not well and fears she must stay in her room. She asked me to give you these papers.'

Then the Earl of Airth and Monteith rose to his feet and held out his hand in full control of himself. 'I think you must be Mrs. O'Mara,' he said. 'It's kind of you to give me tea and I am extremely happy to meet you. I believe I must have seen you outside your pretty home as I drove up the avenue. I am very, very glad to be able to tell you how much I admired your husband. We worked together in Targai and stood together in times of great difficulty and danger. Will you allow me to tell you how much I admired and respected him? Sergeant O'Mara was a very brave man.'

Before quitting Shenstone, Jim Airth sat at Myra's davenport and wrote a letter, leaving it with Mrs. O'Mara to place in Lady Ingleby's hands as soon as he had gone.

'I do not wonder you felt unable to see me again. Forgive me for all the grief I have caused, and am causing, you. I shall go abroad as soon as may be; but am obliged to remain in town until I have completed work which I am under contract with my publishers to finish. It will take a month, at most. If you want to see me Myra, I mean if you *need* me, I could come at any moments. A wire to my Club would always find me. May I know how you are?

Wholly yours, Jim Airth.'

To this Lady Ingleby replied on the following day.

'Dear Jim, 'I shall always want you but I could never send unless the coming would mean happiness for you. I know you decided as you felt right. I am quite well. God bless you always.' Myra

Chapter 13.

In the days that followed, Jim Airth suffered all the pangs which come to a man who has made a decision prompted by pride rather than conviction. It had been essential for him to appear without any blame or shame in the eyes of the woman he loved.

To be obliged suddenly to admit that a fatal blunder had been his, even in the past, caused intolerable humiliation. And the fact that it had also caused her great sorrow and loss could hardly even be admitted. He had been superficially honest with Myra and had said all the things he would expect others to say in similar circumstances. All the pain he was experiencing and causing the woman who loved him, seemed necessary to the demands of the entire ghastly situation. As he had voiced it, all that he had to say to her, sounded so tragically plausible.

It wasn't until he had finally left her and was on his way back to town that he realised it had all been a solace to his own sounded pride. He had made the mistake and it re-established his self-respect and sense of superiority that he should make the decision, so hard to make, to bring down on his own head a punishment out of all proportion to the crime. But now that the strain and tension were over, his natural honesty of mind reasserted itself and he had to admit his selfish view of things. Myra's sweet generosity and simple loving opinion and acceptance had been the right way. But he had plunged them both into a hopeless abyss of needless suffering. This second wrong was a more cruel one than that committed in the past.

Remorse began to gnaw at his heart, added to an almost unbearable longing for Myra. He could not bring himself to return to her a second time with yet another admission of failure. His one hope was that Myra would find their separation unendurable and would send for him but the days passed and she made no sign. She had said she would not unless it meant his happiness and quietly kept her word.

In a strong, virile man, love towards a woman is necessarily selfish. God has designed all its outworking aright.

The man say 'I need,' 'I want,' and with its full expression, 'I must possess.' The woman, on the other hand, says, 'He needs,' 'I am his to do with as he wants,' and its full major chord, 'let me give all.'

This is the natural attitude of the sexes, designed by an all-wise Creator but designed for perfect conditions.

Where any kind of false note has been struck, or any kind of sin, this great loving harmony fails to ring true.

If the working out proves a failure the fault must lie in the workers and not the perfect law of God. This truth is seen in the Song of Solomon, one of the greatest love poems ever written. The woman's heart learns its lesson in self-surrender. First she says, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His.'

Secondly, she says, 'I am my Beloved's and He is mine.' But then, at last, all else is merged in the instinctive joy of giving, 'I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me.' In their perfect love, Jim Airth had introduced this discord of false pride. The sweetest theme of mutual love and trust had lost its harmony. Because of her trustful acquiescing, without a murmur, readjustment became the more impossible.

And so the weeks went by.

Jim Airth worked feverishly at his proofs, drinking and smoking when he should have been eating and sleeping. And going off for violent bouts of exercise.

He walked down to Shenstone by night; sat in bitterness of spirit under the beeches surrounded by empty wicker chairs, watched the dawn break over the lake, narrowly escaping arrest by Lady Ingleby's night watchman and leaving for London on the early morning train more sick at heart than when he started.

Another time he suddenly turned in at Paddington, took the train to Cornwall and astonished the Miss Murgatroyds by stalking into the coffee-room, a gaunt ghost of his old buoyant self. Then he climbed the cliff at Horseshoe Cove and spent the night in misery on the ledge dwelling morbidly on the wonderful memories. It was as he sat on the ledge hugging his loneliness, he suddenly became conscious of Myra's presence. It was as if

the sweet grey eyes were turned to his and the tender mouth smiled lovingly, while the voice he knew so well asked softly, 'What has come over you, dear boy?' He had just put his hand in his pocket to draw out his spirit flask. He held it for a moment while he listened, spellbound, to the soft whisper. Then he flung it away into the darkness, 'There, Davy Jones, you can have it.' Then he laughed for the first time since the afternoon beneath the Shenstone beeches.

Then, with the sense of Myra's presence so near, he lay with his back to the cliff and faced the moonlit sea. It seemed to him as if again he drew her, shaking and trembling, but unresisting, into his arms, holding her there in safety until the trembling had ceased and she slept the untroubled sleep of a little child.

All the best in Jim Airth awoke at that hallowed memory of her trustful peace. 'What a fool to think anything could come between us. My God, what a nightmare it has been. Hasn't she been utterly mine since that night? I have left her to all her grief alone. Well, no past or pride on my part will come between us.'

He could see his watch by the bright moonlight and the rippling water over the edge of the cliff. Midnight. He must wait until three at least for the tide to go down. Minutes later Jim Airth fell fast asleep. The dawn woke him, he scrambled down and once again swam towards the sun. As he got back into his clothes it seemed as though every vestige of the black nightmare was swept away with the glorious tossing water. He passed a farm on his way to the railway station and a farmer's wife who had been up since sunrise gladly gave him home-made bread, fresh butter and a warm glass of milk.

He caught the six o'clock express for town, washed, shaved and lunched at his club. He was conscious at last that he felt clothed and in his right mind. As he stood outside on the steps waiting for a taxi and debating which train he would catch if he called in at his publisher's first, as he felt he ought, the hall porter hastened out with a telegram. Jim Airth read it, looked at his watch, then jumped headlong into a passing cab. 'Charing Cross,' he shouted, 'as quick as you can.' As the flag came down, and the taxi glided swiftly forward into the whirl of traffic, Jim Airth unfolded the telegram and read it again. It had been handed in at Shenstone at 2 p.m. 'Come at once,' Myra. A shout of exultation rose within him. She wanted him.

Ronald and Billy had made it a habit now to turn up as often as they could at Shenstone. They knew things had gone more hopelessly wrong than they had anticipated. They had known, of course, that Jim Airth could not marry Lady Ingleby, but it had never occurred to them that Lady Ingleby would still wish to marry Jim Airth. They were doing their valiant best to be cheerful but Myra's fragile look and large, pathetic eyes alarmed and horrified them.

The days went by and although she always seemed pleased to see them both, no possible opening had been given to Ronald for assuming the role of manly comforter. 'I shall give it up,' said Ronnie, at last, a bitter note in his voice. 'I tell you, I shall give it up and marry the Duchess!'

'Don't be profane,' counselled Billy, 'and it will be a saving useless trouble Ron, if you don't ask me again how Myra took the news about Jim. It would be more to the point to find the man and explain that letting Lady Ingleby die of a broken heart will not atone for blowing up her husband. I knew our news would make no difference from the moment I saw her go quite pink when she told us his name. She never went pink over Lord Ingleby. I didn't know they blushed after about twenty.'

'Much you know, then.' said Ronnie, scornfully. 'I've seen the duchess go pink at her age.' 'Scarlet you mean, but so have I and over quite another matter altogether.' 'Oh, shut up,' sighed Ronnie, wearily. 'Let's stop all this and go back to town. Henley begins tomorrow.'

But next day they turned up at Shenstone, earlier than usual.

Lady Ingleby was feeling strangely restless. She had woken during the night feeling Jim's arms around her. She thought she was falling but instantly seemed drawn into safety. That exquisite sense of strength and rest was hers once more. She sat watching the tennis with a smile of contentment.

'Stay to lunch, boys,' she called, as the gong sounded and all three went happily into the house. 'She is beginning to forget,' thought Ronnie.

As they passed through the hall afterwards, their car stood at the door so they said goodbye and turned to find their tennis rackets. At that moment a boy rode up with a telegram. Grantley, waiting to see them off, followed Lady Ingleby to her sitting-room. There seemed so sudden a silence, both Ronald and Billy stood listening. 'Twenty minutes to two,' said Billy, glancing at the clock. 'Spirits are walking.'

The next moment a cry rang out of such mingled bewilderment and relief they both bolted in to her without a word.

She was standing in the middle of the room with the open telegram. 'Jim,' she was saying, 'Oh, Jim!' Her face was so transfigured by thankfulness and joy that neither men could ask a question. They merely gazed at her. 'Billy, Ronald, he didn't do it! Think what this will mean to Jim. Stop the boy - quick, I must send a telegram back. Oh, boys, he said he would give his life for the relief of the moment if someone told him he didn't do it. Now, I shall be that someone. Oh, quick, please call Grantley, if we hurry the boy might catch the three o'clock train. Grantley, please give this to the boy and give him half-a-crown, he can keep the change. Oh, Billy, Ronald, he did not do it.'

The whirlwind of excitement was succeeded by sudden stillness. The door closed and Lady Ingleby sank into the sofa burying her head in the cushions. In the silence they heard the telegraph boy disappearing rapidly into the distance ringing his bell an unnecessary number of times. When it could be heard no longer, Lady Ingleby lifted her head. 'Michael is alive,' she said. 'Great Scott,' exclaimed Ronnie and took a step forward. Billy made no sound, but he turned very white, backed to the door and leaned heavily against it. 'May we see?' asked Ronald, holding out his hand.

Billy licked his dry lips but no sound came. 'Read it,' said Myra. Ronald took the telegram and read it aloud,

'To Lady Ingleby, Shenstone Park, Shenstone, England.
'Reported death a mistake. Taken prisoner and

escaped to Cairo. Large rewards to pay.
Cable five hundred pounds to Cook's immediately.'

'Great Scott!' said Ronnie again.

Billy said nothing but his eyes never left Lady Ingleby's radiant face. 'Think what it will mean to Jim Airth,' she repeated. 'Er, yes,' said Ronnie. 'It does considerably change things for him. What does this Veritas mean?' 'It is Michael's private code to me because my mother used to interfere in our letter writing. It means this is really from me, and not your Mother. And I used it too.' Lady Ingleby seemed to be collecting her thoughts with difficulty.

'We always suspected that there might somehow be some prisoners. Look, what will you do about cabling the money?'

'Oh, yes, well, of course, the money must be sent straight away. Michael mustn't be kept waiting. Ronnie, could you possibly go up to town for me? I thought I might go myself but now I must wait and tell Jim. Oh, Ronnie, could you? I would give you a cheque and a note to my bankers.'

'Of course I could and I will. If I go now the money would be on its way by tonight. Billy will come too. And there is no need for a cheque. I will see the bank personally, explain the whole thing and hurry them up. Just give me a few lines authorizing your bankers to send out the money.'

Lady Ingleby went straight to her davenport. No sound broke the stillness save the rapid scratching of her pen.

Billy spoke at last. 'May I copy this telegram?' he asked, hoarsely.

'Of course, do,' she said, without looking round.

'Make two copies, Billy. I will give the original to Jim.' Billy had already copied the message into his pocketbook. With shaking fingers he copied it again handing the sheet to Ronald without looking at him.

The note written, Lady Ingleby rose. 'Thank you, Ronald,' she said.

'Thank you, more than I can say. I think you will catch the train. And goodbye, Billy.'

But Billy was already outside in the motor.

Chapter 14

The journey down from town had been as satisfactorily rapid as even Jim Airth could desire. He had caught the train at Charing Cross with five seconds to spare. The hour passed quickly in anticipation. Myra was being brought nearer with every turn of the wheels. Her telegram was drawn from his pocket many times. Each simple word seemed fraught with tender meaning. 'Come at once!'

It was so exactly Myra's simple direct method of expression. It seemed an unconscious response to his own resolution of last night although his sounded so full of necessary romance. 'I will arise and go to my beloved.'

Now that the parting was nearly over he realised how blank and terrible had been the last three weeks spent apart from Myra. Her sweet personality was so knit into his life that he needed her, not in any particular time or way but always, as in the very air he breathed or in

the light which made the day. And she? He drew a well-worn letter from his wallet. The only letter he had ever received from Myra. 'I shall always want you,' it said, 'but I shall never send for you unless your coming would mean happiness for you.' Yet she had sent for him. Then she must have happiness in store. Had she instinctively realised his change of mind? Had she understood it did not matter what sorrow lay in the background? Their desperate hunger for each other was all that mattered? There would be nothing but perfect joy when Myra was his wife.

How much should he tell her, he wondered, of the heart-searchings of the past weeks? He would know how to guard her from the faintest shadow of disillusion. Last night he had meant to tell her everything. He had meant to say 'I have sinned against heaven and I am not worthy of your love.' But was it essential to a woman's happiness to know her man was completely worthy? Why perplex her with explanations? Perhaps, wait until she asked. Let the dead past bury its dead. No need to cloud even a moment of their joy. Now he could go forward into a new life. And what a life. Wedded life to Myra. 'Shenstone Junction!' shouted a porter and Jim Airth was across the platform before the train stopped.

The tandem ponies waited outside and this time Jim gathered up the reins with a smile and flicked the lead pony himself. Now all that was his, was hers, and all hers was his. The ponies dashed through the lanes, well used to never slacking their pace. It was good to be alive on such a day. He whistled, and ducked the overhanging honeysuckle which brushed his shoulder in the narrow lanes. It was good not to be leaving England in England's perfect weather.

Should he take her home to Scotland for their honeymoon or down to Cornwall? What a lovely little church. He looked again for the Lodge. Poor Mrs. O'Mara. It had been difficult to be civil to her as she poured his tea when she had appeared instead of Myra. Scotland would be wonderful of course, with so much to show her but Cornwall meant more with its associations. Yes, he would arrange for the honeymoon in Cornwall. Married in the morning, up in town, no fuss and then straight to the Moorhead Inn. And after dinner they would sit in the honeysuckle arbour. The ponies passed swiftly down the avenue without any guidance from Jim Airth.

Groatley showed him into Myra's sitting-room. She was not there. He walked over to the mantelpiece. It seemed years since he had crashed his fist on its marble edge. He raised his eyes to Lord Ingleby's portrait. Poor old chap! He looked so contented. So pleased with himself and his little dog. But he must always have appeared like Myra's father than her, than her anything else. He saw the telegram and then he turned. Myra was standing behind him. He had not heard her enter. 'Myra,' he cried, and caught her in his arms. The rapture and relief of that moment were unspeakable. No words seemed possible. He could only hold her silently, with all his strength, and realise that she was safely there at last. Myra had lifted her arms and laid them lightly about his neck.

He never knew exactly when he began to realise a subtle change about the quality of her embrace. Her passionate tenderness seemed to be missing. It resembled the trustful clinging of a child. An uneasy foreboding took hold of him. 'Myra,' he said, slowly,

‘will you kiss me?’ She lifted her sweet face to him at once. But it was the pure, loving little kiss of a child.

Then she withdrew herself and stood back. He looked at her, perplexed. ‘Oh, Jim,’ she said, ‘I have such good news for you. God’s ways are so wonderful. I have something so special to tell you and I am so thrilled to be the one to be able to do it. ‘Jim, you didn’t do it!’

Jim Airth gazed at her in troubled amazement. Into his mind came the awesome Scottish word ‘fey’. She did not seem to be herself. ‘I did not do what, dear?’ he asked, leaning forward gently, as if he were speaking to a child and he was anxious not to frighten her. ‘You did not kill Michael.’ He waited, forcing himself to speak quietly and gently. ‘What makes you think I didn’t, dear?’

‘Because Michael is alive,’ said Myra, with clasped hands, ‘he is alive.’

‘Dearest,’ said Jim, tenderly. ‘I should not have left you alone. It was quite wrong. Dear, you are not well. Let me call Mrs. O’Mara or Groatley. I want to tell you I see everything quite differently now.’ He placed her gently on the couch and, looking round, caught hold of a fan. Myra took it to please him and, opened it, fanning herself as he talked. ‘For you see, dear, your view was the right one. We ought to have acted on it and been married at once.’

‘Oh, Jim, thank God we didn’t. It would have been terrible now. We would have gone away together not knowing that Michael was alive.’ Beads of perspiration stood out on Jim Airth’s forehead. He looked around again in manlike helplessness.

‘Myra, dear, have you been ill all these weeks without sending for me?’

‘I’m not ill, Jim dear, really, I’m not. I am only strangely thankful, and I think, happy. But I am worried about the little things I ‘ve done. The worst one, Jim is, that we seem to have lost little Peter’s grave. No-one seems to be able to locate it. Michael would have expected a little marble slab by now. It’s a great worry. I ‘ve told them all to begin digging. Oh, Jim, don’t look so distressed. I know it is only a trivial thing but since I had the telegram and knew Michael was coming back, my mind seems to be dwelling on trivial things. Jim, do you remember telling me how you would give your life for the relief of knowing Michael had not been killed, well, I’m the one to tell you.’

‘Telegram? What telegram?’ Jim interrupted, violently. ‘In heaven’s name,’ he gasped, ‘Myra, what do you mean?’

‘Michael’s telegram, Jim, read it.’

Jim Airth read through the telegram slowly, twice, turning slightly away from her. He still thought she was raving and ill. But the blow was so tremendous he realised she must not see his face at the moment.

‘Ronnie went up to town immediately for me, Jim. Billy went with him. They were both here when it came. Ronald was delighted but I think Billy was slightly stunned. Jim, do you think five hundred is enough? Jim? Jim! Aren’t you thankful?. Jim, do say something.’

Jim Airth put the telegram back slowly. His big hand shook.

‘What is Veritas?’ he asked, without looking round.

'That is our private code, Jim. Michael's and mine. My mother used to write and interfere with our letters to each other - things that weren't true. So Veritas means, this is really from me.

'Then, your husband is coming home to you?' said Jim, slowly.

'Yes, Jim,' the sweet voice faltered, for the first time, and trembled. 'He's coming home.'

Jim could stand it no longer. The unquestioning finality of her patient silence about their love for each other goaded him to slight madness.

He turned to face her at last and his look was terrible.

Myra quaked. She had never seen anything like it.

'But you are mine,' he said, 'not his. Your love is mine. Your body is mine. Your whole life is mine. I won't leave you to another man. We might have been apart, we might have been lonely but we still belong together. You are still mine.

Myra moved a few paces and leant against the mantelpiece.

'Jim, sssh, hush you forget you are speaking to Michael's wife.'

'I'm speaking to the woman who is mine,' said Jim, furiously. 'If it hadn't been for my pride we would have been married - Myra, come away with me now. You know you love me. We could have been far away.'

Myra was very white, her hands gripped the now closed fan, her eyes lowered. But Jim was rushing on, blinded by pain and passion. He failed to notice her look as she raised her head slowly. If he had noticed, he might have taken warning. 'Myra, that poor, cold travesty you knew before, that wasn't love. It was I who taught you about love. Oh, Myra. I have loved you so much. It has been so wonderful. Don't put me through the hell of leaving you again. Come away with me now. Myra, look at me, say you will.

Slowly, Myra brought her head up, at last to look straight at him. 'So,' she said, quietly, 'so this is love. Michael may or may not have cared, but he did trust me. He will come back to find me as I was and as he made me. The mistress of Shenstone, his wife. You are no longer talking to a widow left desolate, you are talking to Lord Ingleby's wife.'

Myra lifted her hand and struck him across the cheek.

'You had better leave and, and don't ever think of coming back.'

Jim Airth staggered, his hand involuntarily raised to ward off another blow. Then, his face ashen, he sprang forward and caught the fan from her hand. For a moment she thought he was going to strike her. She stood erect, she neither flinched nor moved, only the faintest scornful smile touched her lips. Then Jim Airth gripped the fan in both hands, with a twist of his strong wrists, snapped it in half and crushed it into fragments and flung it at her feet, and turning on his heel, left the room and left the house.

Chapter 15

Ronald and Billy spoke very little as they sped to the station earlier on that afternoon. Eventually, Ronnie said, 'Why did you insist on coming with me? I could manage this alone, you know.'

'I am not coming with you,' replied, Billy, bluntly.

'Where then, Billy, and why so tragic? Are you going to leap from London Bridge? You must have known you didn't have much chance with Myra. You were merely a nice friend as far as she was concerned and a very good one, too. But I'm the one who might have been tragic and look at me. I'm going straight to the bank to send off the money that will bring her beloved husband back.'

Billy turned a white face to his friend.

'Ronnie,' he said, 'I'm going straight to Sir Deryck Brand. He is the only one with a head on his shoulders. Because that telegram is an absolute lie.' 'Nonsense, Billy, that is wishful thinking, poor old Ingleby.' 'It is a lie,' said Billy doggedly.

'But here you are, in the telegram, you saw the word Veritas. What do you make of that?'

'Veritas be hanged. It is a lie and we have got to find out what damned deceiver wrote it.'

Ronald became grave. 'But what possible reason can you give to think that?'

'Ronnie, you idiot. *I picked up the pieces..*'

A very nervous, white-faced man sat in the doctor's surgery. He had shown him the telegram, jerked out a few incoherent sentences, after which Sir Deryck, by means of carefully chosen question, had arrived at the main facts.

He now sat at his desk considering them.

'Cathcart,' he said, turning in his swivel chair, 'what reason have you being so certain of Lord Ingleby's death and also that this telegram is a forgery?'

Billy moistened his lips.

'Confound it, Sir Deryck,' he said. 'I picked up the pieces. I've never told anyone, I didn't want it, ever, to be repeated to Myra. I can explain it all to you, if you like.'

'I think you better,' said Sir Deryck, gravely.

So, with white lips, Billy gave the details.

'Come on,' said the doctor, 'I know an extremely good detective. We will go to Scotland Yard and work through them. They have the expertize and the codes and whatnot. You have done the right thing, Billy and done it promptly, but we really have no time to lose.'

Twenty-four hours later, the doctor called at Shenstone Park. He had sent word requesting to be met and now asked the chauffeur to wait for him at the door to take him back to the station.

'I could only come between trains,' he explained to Myra, 'so you must forgive the short notice. I had to send a telegram as I couldn't risk missing you. I've something very important to talk to you about.'

The doctor waited a moment, not sure how to proceed.

He knew Myra well under varying circumstances. He knew she was invariably true to herself and honest and in this undreamed of development of Lord Ingleby's return, he expected to find her quietly acquiescent, eager to resume her wifely duties. She would be filled with a desire to please the man who, with his whims and fancies, had passed completely out of her life for nine months.

He expected to find her as always, just like an April day, sunshine and showers rapidly alternating, happy smiles succeeded by ready tears. Then, with her eyes still wet, laughing at some mistake of her own or behaviour of her erratic household. Instead of this known and charmingly feminine woman he found himself confronted by a calm, cold person with hard, unseeing eyes; someone in whom something had died, and in dying had slain all the best in her womanhood. Another man, was the prompt conclusion at which the doctor arrived. This conclusion, coupled with his own waiting emergencies, brought him very promptly to the point.

‘Lady Ingleby,’ he said, ‘there has been a heartless wrong done to you by some unscrupulous scoundrel and I am here to explain that no retribution will be too severe.’
‘I am perfectly aware of it, Sir Deryck,’ replied Lady Ingleby, calmly, ‘but I find it hard to see why you should leave London to come all this way to discuss it.’
Her unexpected reply troubled him but rapid mental adjustment was a part of his professional equipment. ‘I’m afraid we are speaking at cross purposes,’ he said, gently. ‘Forgive me, I think I’ve trespassed on something about which I have no knowledge. I’m speaking about a telegram which leads us to imagine Lord Ingleby’s death was a mistake.’
‘My husband is alive. I have heard from Cairo and he is coming home soon, yes.’

For answer Deryck Brand drew from his wallet two telegrams.

‘I am bound to tell you at once, my dear, that I am afraid you have been deceived. The message from Cairo was a hopeless fraud. It was designed purely to obtain the money. Billy Cathcart has reason to suspect its genuineness and came straight to me. I cabled at once to Cairo with this result.’ He laid two telegrams on the table before her.

‘The first is a copy of one we sent to a man from Scotland Yard who is out there and the second is a reply. No-one knows of it, not even Billy. I have brought it straight to you.’
Lady Ingleby slowly lifted the paper containing the first message. She read it in silence.

‘Watch Cook’s bank and arrest man impersonating
Lord Ingleby who will call for draft of money.
Cable particulars promptly.’

The doctor observed her closely as she laid down the first message without comment and took up the second.

‘Former valet of Lord Ingleby arrested.
Confesses to despatch of fraudulent telegram.
Cable instructions.’

Lady Ingleby folded both papers and laid them on the table beside her. The calm, white face had undergone no change. ‘It must be Walker,’ she said. ‘Michael never trusted him but I liked him because he played a violin so well and he was so good in the parish choir and entertainment. Michael said he was shifty but he still took him abroad with him. I knew he had to dismiss him out there but he didn’t tell me why. Poor Walker! If he had written me a begging letter I would most likely have sent him the money. I have a fatal habit of believing in people and wanting them to be happy.’

It seemed to Deryck Brand those last words reminded her of a forgotten wound and stony apathy returned to her voice and face. ‘If Michael isn’t coming back after all, I am really alone now.’ she said, at last.

The doctor rose, looking down on her, perplexed and sorrowful.

'My dear, is there someone who should be told of this change of affairs?' he asked gravely.

'No, no-one,' Myra said, emphatically, 'No-one at all. There is no-one it concerns. I wrote to Jane. And I suppose the boys would tell the Duchess at Overdene now.'

'I don't suppose the news has been widely known, my dear, at all. I expect you will need to explain to your household of course.'

'Yes,' replied Myra, 'that reminds me, we can stop digging in the shrubbery. There is no point in little Peter having a proper grave and headstone when his master has none.'

This was unintelligible to the doctor but he never asked unnecessary questions just for his own enlightenment.

'So, after all, Sir Deryck,' added Lady Ingleby, 'little Peter was right.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'little Peter was not mistaken.'

'Had I remembered him, I might have doubted the telegram like Billy.'

'Yes, like Peter, Billy had always been very sure.'

'Dear Billy,' said Lady Ingleby.

The doctor glanced at his watch and buttoned his coat. He had one minute to spare.

'Dear friend,' he said, 'this is the second time I have brought you bad news.'

'Not bad,' she said, in a tone of hopeless sadness, 'this isn't a world to which we could possibly desire the return of one we love.'

'There is nothing wrong with the world,' said the doctor. 'Our individual heaven or hell is brought about by our own actions.'

'Or the actions of others.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, slowly, 'or the actions of others. Now, my dear, I must go. But I wish I didn't leave you alone.'

Lady Ingleby rose and glanced at the clock. She gave him her hand. 'You have been more than kind, Sir Deryck, in coming yourself. I shall never forget it. And I'm expecting Jane Champion, I mean Dalmain, why ever do my friends get married? She will be coming from town and she is due quite soon.'

'Good,' said the doctor and clasped her hand with the strong, silent sympathy of a man, desiring to help, but realising himself in the presence of a grief he is powerless to understand.

'Good, very good,' he said, as he stepped into the car, remarking to the chauffeur, 'We have nine minutes to arrive in time for the next train otherwise I shall have to ask you to run me to town.'

He said it unthinkingly a second time as the car flew down the avenue and he passed Lady Ingleby's phaeton returning from the station empty, save for a travelling coat and bag left on the seat. He saw, with surprise, the Honourable Mrs. Dalmain walking slowly beneath the trees, in earnest conversation with a very tall man, who carried his hat, letting the breeze blow through his thick rumped hair.

Both were too preoccupied to notice the motor, but as the man turned his haggard face toward his companion, the doctor saw in it the same stony look of hopeless despair which had grieved and baffled him in Lady Ingleby's. The two were slowly wending their way toward the house, by a path leading down to the terrace.

'Evidently, *the man*,' thought the doctor. 'Well, I'm glad Jane is with them. Poor souls. They will undoubtedly receive faithful and honest plain speaking.'

The express was one minute late and the doctor caught it.

Whereat the chauffeur rejoiced as he was walking out with Her Ladyship's maid and had no wish to miss her evening off.

He had, therefore, driven as fast as he dared to miss a trip to London.

Life's all-important events are apt to hang on the happenings of one minute.

Chapter 16

'So you see, Jane,' concluded Myra, pathetically, 'as Michael is not coming back, I am very much alone now.'

'Loving Jim Airth as you do' said Jane Dalmain.

'Did,' interposed Lady Ingleby,

'Did and do,' said Jane, 'you would have been worse than alone if Michael had, after all, come back. Oh, dear Myra, I cannot imagine anything more unendurable than to love one man and be obliged to live with another.'

'I should not have allowed myself to go on loving Jim.'

'Rubbish!' pronounced Mrs. Dalmain, with forceful decision.

'My dear Myra, that kind of remark paves the way for devilish tricks. More good women have been tripped up by over-confidence in their ability to curb and control their own affections, than by direct temptation to love where it is not lawful. Men are different, their temptations are not so subtle. If they mean to do right, they keep clear of the temptation in the beginning. I know you would not have let yourself care for Jim Airth if you had not been free. But, once loving him, you can't possibly forbid yourself to go on loving. If such an appalling situation had arisen as the unexpected return of your husband your only safe course would have been to say openly to Lord Ingleby, I grew to love Jim Airth while I believed you dead. I shall always love Jim Airth but I want to be a good and faithful wife. Trust me to be faithful and help me to be good. Any man would respond to such an appeal.'

'And shoot himself?' suggested Myra. 'I said a man, not a coward.' responded Jane..

'Jane, you are so strong-minded,' murmured Myra, 'I can't picture myself standing in front of Michael and saying all that.'

Jane laughed. 'If by strong-minded you mean not getting involved in a tangled situation and making it worse.'

Jane, you sound like Deryck Brand. You should have married him. I always thought you would. I never understood how an artist, such a poet, such an idealist as Garth Dalmain, falling love with you Jane!'

A sudden light of womanly tenderness illumined Jane's plain face. 'The wife' looked out from it in simple unconscious radiance. 'Nor could I,' she said, softly. 'It took me three years to realise it as an undeniable fact.'

'I suppose you are very happy.' Jane was silent. There were shrines in that strong nature too wholly sacred to be easily unveiled. 'I remember how I hated the idea after the accident,' said Myra, 'that you should tie yourself to someone who was blind.'

'Hush, hush, dear,' said Jane Dalmain, quickly. 'You are treading on sacred ground. From the very first the sweetest thing between my husband and myself, has been that together, we learned to kiss that cross.'

'Dear old thing, you do deserve to be happy,' said Myra affectionately. 'All the same I never can understand why you didn't marry Deryck Brand.'

Jane smiled. She was quite willing to divert Myra from her own troubles although she couldn't discuss her husband.

'My dear,' she said, 'Deryck and I were far too much alike ever to have dovetailed into marriage. A perfect friendship doesn't always mean a perfect marriage. All our points would have met and our differences gaped wide open. There was a time, if he had asked me, I might have said yes as it never occurred to me to refuse him anything, but I had no idea what love really meant. I no more understood it until I met Garth, than you did until you met Jim Airth.'

'I wish you would stop alluding to Jim Airth,' said Myra, wearily. 'I never want to hear his name again. And while we are talking about it, I would have made myself please Michael in everything. You needn't look so amused, Jane. I can make myself do things, I should have made myself forget there was ever a person in this world as the Earl of Airth and Monteith.'

'Oh spare him that,' laughed Jane. 'If he is going to be hanged, let it be just plain Jim Airth. You sound like a romantic paperback penny dreadful. Mercifully, Michael is not coming back so we are not discussing something hypothetical.'

'Mercifully, Jane,' said Myra, 'you are so unsympathetic. You should have heard how tactfully the doctor broke the news to me and how kind he was.'

'Well, I am not wasting sympathy on false sentiments,' said Mrs. Dalmain.

'If Deryck had known you were engaged to another man, instead of wasting four hours of his valuable time, he could have sent a cheap wire saying, 'Telegram a forgery. Accept heartfelt congratulations.'

'Jane, you are brutal, how can you speak of the whole heartbreaking thing with such frivolity?'

Instantly, Jane Dalmain's whole bearing altered. She ceased to look amused and stopped swinging her brown boot, uncrossing her legs. She sat up, held out her large capable hands to Myra and her noble face, strong and tender, was full of womanly understanding and sympathy. 'Ah, now my dear,' she said, 'now we must come to the point of the whole matter. I've merely been playing with you, round the edge of things, so to speak. To be honest, it was to give you time to recover. The real question is this, are you going to forgive Jim Airth?'

'I can never forgive him because if I did I could never let him go,' said Lady Ingleby..

'Well, why let him go, when, if he does, your whole life is left desolate?'

'Because,' said Myra, trying hard to think her answer out sensibly, 'because, I, I feel I couldn't trust him. I couldn't marry a man I love so much, if I can't trust him as much as I trust God. Don't you understand? I love him so much, he would be completely master of me in the end and if I didn't trust him absolutely, I'd be afraid.'

'Is a man never to be trusted again, because he failed you once?' asked Jane. 'Jane, he said, come away with me, you are mine,' Myra spoke with horror, 'don't you see, all standards were set aside in one selfish desire. I couldn't risk it.' She tried again to rescue her thoughts.

'Jane, I knew the priceless treasure of his love so the sin against that love seems unforgivable.'

Mrs. Dalmain looked earnestly at her friend. Her steadfast eyes were deeply troubled. 'Myra,' she said, 'you are absolutely right in your definition and also your conclusions. But you make no allowances for the sudden, desperate overwhelming nature of Jim's temptation. He was alone, dear, think of it, no mother, no wife, no woman's tenderness. And those ten hard years of loneliness when he struggled with disillusion and betrayal. He overcame all the temptations the world gave him then and became completely independent. Then you came along. His ideals returned purified and strengthened by having to go through fire, as it were. Love came with such gigantic force in a new and untasted experience he had not dreamed life could contain. Three weeks of it, he had, increasing in richness every day. Then he had to come through the news of Lord Ingleby's return. Such words you say you gave him must have been worse than blows. Myra, you called him a coward and traitor you said, which he may have deserved but I'll tell you something you may have forgotten. Saint Peter was a coward and a traitor three times over but his Lord never doubted the loyalty of his love and He forgave him, freely. Oh, Myra dear, can you really let him go, out into the world again, desolate and without one word of forgiveness.

'Jane, how do I know he wants my forgiveness. He left me in a towering fury. And how could it reach him, if I did forgive. Where is he now? He is probably far away as he said, on his way to go abroad, somewhere, oh dear.'

'He left you in despair, my dear,' said Mrs Dalmain, calmly, 'but he is now in the library.'

'Oh no, Jane. Jim in this house,' Myra rose to her feet. 'Who let him in?' 'I did,' said Jane, coolly, 'I smuggled him in and in he came. Not a soul saw us enter. He has been sitting in the library ever since. Oh, don't look so distraught. If you decide not to see him, I'll go and tell him. It's all right, dear, I'm not trying to hurry you. This is a major decision you are making. Lord Airth doesn't want to force an interview at all and wont be surprised if you decide against seeing him.'

'Jane, Jane, I dare not see him it's not a matter of wanting to or not.'

'Now, let me tell you how we met,' said Jane, ignoring the last remark. 'He recognized me immediately from a recent photograph you showed him and introduced himself straight away. The fact is that he is off to America almost in a few days but cannot bring himself to go feeling that you and he are parting forever in anger. His love for you is very great, 'Oh, Jane,' cried Myra, 'I can't let him go and I can't marry him. Jane, what shall I do?' 'You must give him a chance,' said Jane, decidedly. 'Listen, dear, tell him you can't let him go, as you have told me, and see what happens. He does not know about the telegrams that the doctor received. No-one does. Jim will still think Michael is coming home. This has given you the power to give Jim Airth his chance. You mustn't deny him that. Years ago, when Garth and I were in a hopeless tangle of a mistake, Deryck found us a way out. He said if Garth could forget his blindness and go behind it, as it

were, and make his decision like that the whole question would be solved. I need not trouble you with the details but that is what happened, and our great happiness resulted. Jim Airth must be given the chance to go back before his totally out-of-character words to you about going away with him and then he will retrieve his self-respect.

Now, dear, have you told anyone about the second telegram from Cairo?’

‘No, nobody, until you walked in.’

‘Good. Very well, then, Jim Airth will have no idea of any change of conditions. Do you understand? Do you see what that means, Myra?’

Lady Ingleby’s pale face flushed. ‘Oh, Jane, I daren’t! If he failed me again, if he is not all I have believed him to be,’

‘He will not fail,’ replied Jane with decision. ‘If he does, then you can forgive him and let him go. My dear, dear Myra, you need to learn a lesson about married life. True happiness does not come from marrying an idol set on a pedestal. Before Galatea could wed Pygmalion, she had to change from marble into glowing flesh and blood and step down off her pedestal. . Love shouldn’t make us blind to each other’s faults. It should only make us tender and completely understanding. The best thing marriage provides is that each gets somebody who will love, forgive and understand. If you waited for perfection you would reach heaven a spinster.’

Myra laughed in spite of herself. ‘Oh dear,’ she said, ‘I wonder whether Michael and I made the mistake of not realising each other to be so human and of not admitting there was anything to forgive and therefore never forgiving?’

‘Well, don’t make the same mistake with Jim Airth. He is the most human and loveable man I ever met.’

‘Do wait a little while, Jane, and give me time to think, time to decide.’

‘Nonsense, my dear,’ said Jane, ‘When there is only one right course to take there is no need for deciding or hesitating. Face your ordeal and if it is to be successful there must be no uncertainty. I can’t stay, I am never away from Garth for a night, as you know. But he and little Geoff went down to Overdene this morning with Simpson and nurse so if your man can motor me over this evening I will stay as long as you want for now.’

‘Oh, thank you, thank you, Jane,’ said Lady Ingleby. ‘You have done so much for me, more than you can possibly know. I feel I would like to be alone for an hour. I owe it to Jim and myself to be absolutely sure of what I want to say. Please order tea in the library and tell him I will see him here, later. Jane, please don’t tell him anything at all of all that has passed between us.’

‘My dear,’ said Jane Dalmain, gently, ‘you can trust me absolutely.’

She rose and stood on the hearth rug for a moment looking intently at her husband’s painting of Lord Ingleby.

‘And, Myra,’ she said at last, ‘I do implore you to remember you are dealing with an unknown quantity. You have never known a man like Jim Airth nor have you known a love like his. Depend more on instinct than on reasoning.’

‘I understand, Jane,’ said Lady Ingleby. ‘But I feel at this moment and with such a decision I dare not depend on instinct or reasoning. I have never been a particularly

religious woman, as you know, but lately, when I have been in the dark or in a difficult place, I have been learning and practising and I've also been praying. I have been trying to say at such times, Even there shall Your hand lead me and Your right hand shall hold me.

'You are right, dear,' said Jane's deep, earnest voice, 'that is best of all. God's hand will surely guide you.'

She hugged her friend for a moment.

'I'll send him in to you in one hour,' she said, and left the room
Lady Ingleby was alone.

Chapter 17

The door of Myra's sitting-room opened quietly and Jim Airth came in. She waited for him on the couch, sitting very still with her hands folded on her lap. The room seemed full of flowers and soft sunlight.

He closed the door softly and came and stood before her.

For a few moments they looked steadily into each others eyes. Then Jim Airth spoke, very low. 'It is good of you to see me,' he said 'It is more than I had hoped. I am leaving England in a few hours. It, it would have been hard to go without seeing you.' She lifted her eyes again to his and waited in silence.

'Myra,' he said, 'can you forgive me?'

'I don't know, Jim,' she answered, gently. 'I want to be honest with myself and with you. If, if I had cared less, it would have been easier.'

'I know,' he said, 'Myra, I know. I wouldn't want you to forgive lightly. But dear, if, if you could say, I understand, it would mean just as much, if not more.'

'Jim,' she answered, gently, a tremor in her sweet voice, 'I understand.'

He came quite near and took her hands in his, holding them for a moment with a very tender reverence. 'Thank you, dear,' he said. He loosed her hands and she folded them back onto her lap. Walking to the mantelpiece, he stood looking down into the fireplace. She noticed the stoop of his broad shoulders, the way in which he found it difficult to hold up his head. Where was the proud, happy carriage of the man who swung along the Cornish cliffs, whistling like a blackbird?

'Jim,' she said, slowly and carefully, measuring every word. 'Understanding fully, of course, I forgive fully, if, between you and me, forgiveness is necessary. Ever since I knew you were in the house, I have been wondering why it was so difficult to say, 'I forgive you'. Jim, I think it is because you and I are so one, that there is no room for such a thing to pass between us. Complete understanding and unflinching love takes its place.'

He lifted his eyes for a moment full of a dumb anguish, which wrung her heart. 'Myra, I must go,' he said, brokenly. 'There was so much I had to tell you, so much to explain, only it all seems to be swept away by your comprehension. Don't say any more, dear, let those be the last words I hear from you. I shall carry them with me always. Only may I say it? Never let thoughts of me sadden your life. I am going to America. It is a wonderful place for new beginnings. A place where a man can find fulfilment if he works hard. I want you to think of me as living, working, striving, not going under. But if I ever do feel like going under I shall hear your dear voice singing at my shoulder in the little Cornish church, on that quiet Sunday evening 'Eternal Father, strong to save' and, my dear, I shall know your life is being good and beautiful and happy with,'. He lifted his eyes to Lord Ingleby's portrait and dwelt for a moment on the kind, quiet face, 'with one of the best of men.' Jim Airth finished bravely.

He took a last look at her face. Silent tears stole slowly down it and fell on her folded hands. A spasm of anguish shot across Jim Airth's set features. 'I must go. I must go. God keep you.'

He turned so quickly that his hand was on the handle of the door before Myra sprang up and flew across the room.

'Jim,' she said, breathlessly, 'stop, Jim. Stop, stop. Listen, wait. Jim. I've always known, I told Jane, if I forgave you, I could never let you go.'

She flung her arms round his neck, as he stood gazing at her in dumb bewilderment. 'Jim, I can't let you go. If you must go, take me with you. I can't live without you, Jim Airth.' For the space of a dozen heartbeats, he stood silent and still, her clinging arms about his him

.Then a cry burst from him that made Myra's heart stand still. 'O God, now I have dragged you down, too. This is worst of all. Not this. O God. Help me, not this. I have weakened your pure strength by coming back. I should never have come.'

Then he lifted his hands to his neck, took her by the wrists and forcibly drew them down, stepping back a pace so that she had to lift her head. Holding her hands once again against his breast in so loving a fashion as he had done in days before, he said, 'Myra, Lady Ingleby, look into my face, lift your eyes.' And slowly Myra did as she was told, lifting her grey eyes to his.

The fire blazing in his blue eyes held her. She felt his strength mastering her as it had often done before.

'Lady Ingleby,' he said, and his grip tightened. 'Lady Ingleby, we stood like this together, you and I, on a narrow strip of sand. The high cliff rose away from a cruel sea and I said to you, 'we must climb'. Do you remember? I say it again now. The only possible thing to do is to climb, to climb to heights above the cruel sea of this fierce temptation, up to the cliff top, to the blue sky, the open place above, a place of right and good. You stood there before, and now I have dragged you down. God forgive me but you must climb, Myra, but you must do it this time alone. When I have gone you will find it easier. Forgive me now, again, if I seem rough. But you will soon find yourself safe and high, above these treacherous, dangerous waters of temptation.' He forced her gently backwards to the couch. 'Sit there,' he said, 'and don't move until I have left the house. Remember at all times, that the whole blame was mine. Will you now loose my hands, please?'

'Jim, Jim, you can't leave me to climb alone. Jim, I am all yours, I am free and no other man's.' Myra clung on to those big hands, weeping and trying to speak. 'Dearest, dearest Jim, don't pull away from me, read these telegrams quickly. Sir Deryck Brand brought them down this afternoon. Oh, now, it is you must forgive me. Jim God will help us climb together. I wanted you to prove to yourself what I always knew you to be, kind, brave, faithful, a man I could trust, who will never fail me.'

Her voice faltered into silence as Jim Airth knelt at her feet, his head in her lap, his arms flung about her, sobbing as only a strong man can sob, when his heart has been strained to breaking point, and suddenly relief has come.

Myra laid her hands gently on the roughness of his hair. They stayed long, without speaking or moving.

And in those sacred minutes Myra learned the lesson which ten years of wedded life had failed to teach; that in the strongest man there is, sometimes, the eternal child, eager, masterful, dependent, full of needs; and that in every woman's love there must, therefore, be an element of the eternal mother, tender, understanding, patient, wise and yet self-surrendering, able to bear and to forgive, her strength made perfect in her weakness.

At length Jim Airth lifted his head. The last beams of the setting sun, entering through the western window, illumined with a golden ray, the lovely face above him.

But he found her more radiant than the reflected glory of any earthly sunset.

'Myra, Myra.' It was all he could say but there was awe and wonder in his voice.

She clasped her hands about his neck, 'Dear one, dear Jim. I have learnt a lesson,' she said, 'that only you could teach. At last, beloved Jim. I am ready for, to be your wife, for wifehood.'

The hall at the Moorhead Inn seemed very home-like to Jim Airth and Myra, as they stood together looking round it, on their arrival. Jim had set his heart on bringing his wife there, on the evening of their wedding day. Therefore they had left town immediately after the ceremony, dined en route and now stood, as they had so often stood before when bidding each other goodnight, in the lamp-light beside the marble table.

'Oh, Jim dear,' whispered Myra, throwing back her cloak, 'doesn't it all seem so natural? Look at the old clock! Five minutes past ten. The Miss Murgatroyds must have gone up in the staid procession, exactly four minutes ago. Look at the stag's head! There's the antler where you always put your cap.'

'Myra,'

'Yes, dear. Do you know I am going to fly upstairs and unpack. Then I shall come out and sit in the honeysuckle arbour with you. It doesn't matter if we are late because the dear ladies don't know we have come back. But Jim you must plonk your boots outside, just for fun, just to make Miss Suzannah's heart jump.

Just wait until Polly has finished helping Sam with our luggage. I can feel her hanging over the top of the stairs. Be patient just a little while, my Jim. Let's put our names in the visitor's book. What shall we write? We will be obliged to let them know who you

really are. Think what excitement for them. But, just for once I am going to write the name I most want to write and, of all others, the most I want to keep.'

So, smiling happily at her husband, then bending over the table to hide her face from the adoring eyes, the newly-made Countess of Airth and Monteith took up her pen. Without bothering to remove her gloves, Myra wrote in the visitor's book of the Moorhead Inn, in the clear, bold handwriting peculiarly her own:

Mrs. Jim Airth

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