

Patience? Yes, that's the woman's game. The dull delight of solitude, Where made the frame, And speech and laughter no intruder.

Night after night, beside the fire, When evening's lonely lamp is lit, Oppressed with thoughts last vex and tire, Among the cards her fingers flit.

The woman's game! On some poor king The sequence of her play is built; The queen comes after, hapless thing! And next the knave with grinning guilt.

Then all her treasures, one by one, Are thrown away to wail and pine, At last and least, when that is done, Begin again, the night beguile.

A woman's game: to sit and wait; Build and rebuild, though fate destroy. Shuffle the cards, for soon or late There comes an end to grief and joy.

A man may fight, or sow or reap, Divide the seas, or traverse the earth; Shut but his eyes, or pray or weep, What is his life or living worth?

She sits there when the day is dead, Lonely and listless. Do you dare Diny, when all is done and said, That woman's game is solitaire?

"Pastoral Poetry." A minister may love his wife, From every ill protect her; But love her he may not, At last he's only teacher.

And though she may quite rapid be, No race horse may quite rapid be, She'll find, however swift and free, That he is always Pastor.

They studied grammar in the school Together out in Carson, Where I only lost my sight, He found him still a Parson.

And though he boasts he feels as young As when he first beheld her, His complexion's faded, That he is yet the elder.

THE CHOICE OF THREE: A NOVEL.

"Oh, no, don't pity me. Everybody has his troubles—this is mine."

"O Ernest, but you have been unfortunate, and that's not all; but perhaps Critchett or Couper will be able to do something for that."

"All the Critchets and Coupers in the world will never do anything for it, my dear. Only you must remember that, where I only lost my sight, my others lost their lives, and it is supposed to be better to lose your sight than your life. Besides, blindness has its advantages; it gives you so much more time to think, and it humbles you. You can have no idea what it is like, Doll. Intense, overwhelming blackness hedging you in like a wall, one long, long night, even when the sunlight is beating on your face; and out of the night, voices and the touchings of hands, like the voices and touchings of the departed spirits. Your physical body is as helpless and as much at the mercy of the world as your spiritual body is in the hands of the Almighty. And things grow dim to you; you begin to wonder what familiar faces and sights are like, as you wonder about the exact appearance of those who died many years ago, or of places you have not seen for years. All of which, my dear Doll, is very favorable to thought. When next you lie awake for five or six hours in the night, try to reckon all the things which occupy your brain, then imagine such wakefulness and its accompanying thoughts extended over the period of your natural life, and you will get some idea of the depth and breadth and height of total blindness."

His words struck her, and she did not know what to answer, so she only pressed his hands in token of her mute sympathy. He understood her meaning; the faculties of the blind are very quick, "coming back to you and to your gentle kindness, is like coming into the peace and quiet of a sheltered harbor after bearing the full brunt of the storm." Just then a cloud which had obscured the sun passed away, and its full light shone upon his face. "There," he went on, "it is like that. It is like emerging into the sweet sunshine after riding for miles through the rain and mist. You bring peace with you, my dear. I have not felt such peace for years as I feel holding your hand to-day. Dear Ernest," she answered, and they walked on in silence. At that moment, a little girl, who was trundling a hoop down the gravel-path, stopped her hoop to look at the pair. She was very pretty, with large dark eyes, but Dorothy noticed that she had a cunning mark upon her forehead. Presently Dorothy saw her run back toward an extremely tall and graceful woman, who was sauntering along, followed at some distance by a nurse with a baby in her arms, and turning occasionally to look at the beds of spring flowers, hyacinths and tulips which bordered the path.

"O mother," she heard her call out in the clear voice of childhood, "there is such a nice blind man, and a very kind and ugly, and he hasn't a dog, and he doesn't ask for pennies. Why is he blind if he hasn't a dog and doesn't ask for pennies?"

Blindness, according to this little lady's ideas, evidently sprang from the presence of a dog and an unsatisfied hunger for copper coin.

The tall, graceful lady looked up carelessly, saying, "Hush, dear!" She was quite close to them now, for they were walking toward each other, and Dorothy gave a great gasp, for before her stood Eva Plowden! There was no doubt about it. She was paler and haughtier-looking than of yore; but it was she. No one who had once seen her could mistake that queenly beauty. Certainly Dorothy could not mistake it.

"What is the matter, Doll?" said Ernest, carelessly. He was thinking of other things.

"Nothing; I hurt myself." They were quite close now.

And Eva, too, looked at them, and she, too, saw the face she had never thought to see again. With all her eyes, and with her lips parted as though to cry out, she gazed at the sight before her—slowly, slowly, taking in all it meant.

They were nearly level now.

Then there leaped up into her eyes and face—the eyes and face which a second before had been so calm and statue-like, a wild light of love, and intensity of passion, and jealous desire, such as is not often to be seen on the faces of women.

"Ernest, there was no doubt about it, and being led by the hand of Dorothy, and looking happy with her!" How dared she touch her love? How dared he look happy with her? Those were the thoughts which flashed through her troubled mind.

She made a dash toward them as though to address him, and the blind eyes fell upon her lovely face and wandered over it. It made her mad. His eyes were on her face, and yet he could not see her. O God!

Dorothy saw the motion and moved by an overmastering instinct threw herself between them in an attitude of protection not unmarked with defiance. And so, for a second, their eyes flashing and their bosoms heaving with emotion, the two women stood face to face, and the blind pathetic eyes wandered unceasingly over both, feeling a presence they were unable to define.

It was a tragic, almost a dreadful scene. The passions it revealed were too intense for words, as no brush can justly paint a landscape made more by the unnatural fierceness of the lightning.

"Well, Doll, why do you stop?" he said, impatiently.

His voice broke the spell. Eva withdrew

her arm, which was half-outstretched, and touched her lips with her finger as though to enjoin silence. Then a deep misery spread over her face, and her hands, which had been low, and she passed thence with rapid steps. Presently the nurse with the baby followed her, and Dorothy noticed vaguely that the child had also a mark upon her forehead. The whole thing had not taken five seconds.

"Doll," said, with wild voice, and commencing to tremble, "who was that passed us?"

"A lady," was the answer.

"A lady; yes, I know that—what lady?"

"I don't know—a lady with children."

It was a fib, but she could not tell him then; an instinct warned her not to do so.

"Oh! It is strange, Doll, strange; but you do know, I felt just now as though I were very near her? Come, let us go home."

Just then the cloud got over the sun again, and they walked home in the shadow. Apparently, too, all their talkativeness had gone the way of the sun. They had nothing to say.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INTERJECTIVE.

Eva Plowden could scarcely be said to be a happy woman. A refined woman who has deliberately married one man when she knew another not as a rule happy afterward, unless indeed she is blessed or cursed with a singularly callous nature. But there are degrees and degrees of unhappiness. Such a fate as Eva's would have killed Dorothy, and would have driven Florence, had she been otherwise, to suicide or madness. But with Eva herself it was not so; she was not sufficiently fine strung to suffer thus. Hers was not a very happy life, and that was all about it. She had been most miserable; but when the first glow of her misery had passed, like the raving storm that sometimes ushers in a joyous thing, it was at least endurable.

And yet with it all she loved Ernest in her heart as much as ever; his memory was inexpressible dear to her, and his regrets were sometimes very bitter. On the whole, however, she had got over it wonderfully, better than anybody, who could have witnessed her agony some years before, when Florence told her the whole truth immediately after the wedding would have thought possible. The Sabine women, we are told, never even reasoned with their captives to their outrage by the Romans, but before long gave the strongest proof of reconciliation to their lot. There was something of the Sabine woman about Eva. Indeed, the contrast between her state of mind at present and that of her former state of mind as regarded her, would make a curious study. They each loved the other, and yet how different had the results of that love been on the two natures! To Eva it had been and was a sorrow, and sorrow had made her life a struggle, and the destruction of all that made life worth living. The contrast, indeed, was almost pitiable, it was so striking; so wide a gulf was fixed between the two. The passion of the one was a wretched thing compared to the other; but the one was real; it was real; it was a difference of degree. If Eva's affection was weak when measured by Ernest's, it was because the soil in which it grew was poorer. She gave all she had to give.

As for Mr. Plowden, he could not but feel that on the whole his matrimonial speculation had answered very well. He was honestly fond of his wife, and as he had a right to be, very proud of her. At times she was cold and capricious, and at times she was sarcastic; but, take it all together, she made him a most serviceable wife, and lifted him up many pegs in the social scale. People saw that though Plowden was not a gentleman, he had managed to marry a lady, and a very lovely lady too; and he was tolerated, indeed, as a certain kind of a success in the eyes of his wife. It was principally to attain this end that he had married her, so he had every reason to be satisfied with his bargain, and he was, besides, proud to be the legal owner of so handsome a creature. And, as for the whole, his matrimonial speculation had answered very well. He was honestly fond of his wife, and as he had a right to be, very proud of her. At times she was cold and capricious, and at times she was sarcastic; but, take it all together, she made him a most serviceable wife, and lifted him up many pegs in the social scale. People saw that though Plowden was not a gentleman, he had managed to marry a lady, and a very lovely lady too; and he was tolerated, indeed, as a certain kind of a success in the eyes of his wife. It was principally to attain this end that he had married her, so he had every reason to be satisfied with his bargain, and he was, besides, proud to be the legal owner of so handsome a creature. And, as for the whole, his matrimonial speculation had answered very well.

Presently, however, two points became clear in the confusion of her mind, taking shape and form as distinct and indisputable mental facts, and these were—first, that on the whole, his matrimonial speculation had answered very well; second, that it was her fixed determination to see Ernest. She regretted now that she had not too overcome to go up and speak to him, for she knew she must and would; indeed, her sick longing to look upon his face and hear his voice filled her with alarm.

Eva reached her home, after the meeting on the Hoe, just before luncheon-time. Her husband was now acting as locum tenens for the rector of one of the Plymouth parishes. The afternoon of the day was passed in place vacant for the rector, and Eva liked the roving life well enough—it diverted her thoughts.

Presently she heard her husband enter, bringing somebody else with him, and she felt that on the whole, his matrimonial speculation had answered very well. It was principally to attain this end that he had married her, so he had every reason to be satisfied with his bargain, and he was, besides, proud to be the legal owner of so handsome a creature. And, as for the whole, his matrimonial speculation had answered very well.

"Let me introduce my friend Lieutenant Jasper to you, my dear," he said in his full, strong voice, which was yet unpleasant to the ear. "We met at Captain Johnston's, and, as you are long way to go to the barracks for lunch, I asked him to come and take pot-luck with us."

The cherubic Jasper had screwed an eyeglass into his round eye, and through it he was contemplating Eva with astonished ecstasy; but like most beautiful women, she made a dash toward them as though to address him, and the blind eyes fell upon her lovely face and wandered over it. It made her mad. His eyes were on her face, and yet he could not see her. O God!

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nearing the conclusion of the meal, a messenger arrived to summon Mr. Plowden to christen a dying baby. He got up at once, and he was punctilious in the performance of his duties, and, making excuses to his guest, departed on his errand, thus forcing Eva to carry on the conversation.

"Have you been in Plymouth long, Mr. Jasper?" she asked.

"The evening's stopped spasmodically."

"Plymouth? Oh, dear, no, I only landed this morning."

"Landed? Indeed! Where from? I did not know that any boat was in except the Conway Castle."

"Well, I came by her, from the Zulu War, you know. I was invalidated home forever."

The cherub suddenly became intensely interesting to Eva, for it had struck her that Ernest must have come from there.

"I faced a couple of months' unpleasant passage. It depends so much on your fellow-passengers, does it not?"

"Oh, yes, we had a very nice lot of men on board, wounded officers mostly. There were a couple of very decent civilians, too, a giant of a fellow called Jones, and a blind baronet, Mr. Ershaw."

Eva's bosom heaved.

"I once knew a Mr. Ernest Kershaw; I wonder if it is the same? He was tall, and had dark eyes."

"That's the man; he only got his title a month or two ago. A melancholy sort of a chap, I thought; but then he can't see now. That Jones is a wonderful fellow, though—could pull two heavy men up at once, as easily as you would lift a puppy-dog. Saw him do it myself. I knew them both out there."

"Oh! Where did you meet them?"

"Well, it was rather curious. I suppose you heard of the great disaster at that place with an awful name. Well, I was at a beastly hole called Hiep Kakaar, when a fellow came along with anything from Rorke's Drift, telling us what had happened, and that the Zulus were coming. So we all set to and worked like mad, and just as we had got the place a little fit for them, somebody shouted that he saw them coming. That was just as it was getting dark. I ran to the wall to look, and saw, not the Zulus, but a great big fellow carrying a dead fellow in his arms, followed by a Kafir leading three horses. At least I thought the fellow was dead, but he wasn't—he had only been fainting. We let him in, and such a sight as there were you never saw, all soaked with blood from top to toe!"

"Ah! And how did they come like that?"

"They were the only survivors of a volunteer corps called Alston's Horse. They killed all the Zulus that were attacking them, when the Zulus had killed everybody except them. Then they came away, and the blind fellow, that is, Sir Ernest, got struck in a storm—fellows often do that there."

Eva put further questions, and listened with breathless interest to the story of Ernest's and Jeremy's wonderful escape, so far as the details were known to Mr. Jasper, who, as it was getting dark, had to break up in a storm—fellows often do that there."

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