

'I've lost everything. I care for except you,' he said with unwonted tenderness. 'I shall have to die some day, and in any case I may die before you. Who knows?'

That is possible. Thousands of young fellows die who never see a battlefield; that I grant. Should death come to you unsought, as it did to all our dear ones, I should bow to the divine will, I hope. But you have no right to court death. You have no right to tempt Providence by rushing into imminent danger. And surely some consideration is due to me, even if you value your life so cheaply.

'You are the one motive that holds me back. The trouble I might cause you is the only argument of any weight against my going.'

I could well understand how ardently he longed to get away from himself; yet the means he proposed terrified me. Every day the newspapers contained long lists of dead and dying. Paul was bent upon courting a like fate; for no soldier can count upon immunity from the danger which ever hangs over him when on the field of battle; and Paul, sick at heart, and disgusted with life's bitterness, would be impatient of precautions. My heart was torn with the dread of losing him forever. Not only did I grudge the sacrifice of the hope of our family, but still more the risk of a life so dear to me. The disparity in our ages had changed the character of my love for him; it was as a mother, rather than an elder sister, that I had cherished him since his mother was taken from him in early boyhood.

And yet I could not help seeing that the absolute change of life which his departure would involve—the unfamiliar hardships, the unwonted occupations, strange surroundings, unknown faces—promised a relief otherwise impossible. The very nearness of constant danger would tend to lift him up above mere selfish interests. He was young and he was impressionable; and, though his recent cruel disappointment must needs leave its traces upon his after-life, it might well be that so thorough a break with the past as this project involved would enable Time, the universal healer, to work an effectual cure.

Reflecting thus, I resolved to oppose no longer.

'I have had an anxious time, Paul,' I said, a few days later. 'My mind has been torn by fears and doubts on your behalf, but I have conquered them at last. I have come to the conclusion that there is such a thing as too much solicitude in a matter of this kind. After all, we can, none of us, reckon with certainty upon even one more hour of life. I will not try to keep you at home against your will. Go, if you wish, with Stephen Ker; and may God have you in His holy keeping!'

'Many thanks, Sally dear!' he said, as he brightened up. 'I know what a wrench it means for you. But peace comes through war, and I look to this war to bring peace to me.'

In less than a week from that day he was upon the ocean.

II.

Laynham was but a small country village, and posts were erratic. No newspaper ever made its appearance until late in the morning, when it was eagerly pounced upon for the latest war news. I never scanned the list of casualties without a sinking at heart, for dread of what tidings it might have for me. Yet I never failed to read it.

About a month after Paul's arrival at the seat of war, I opened the paper as usual. My eye caught at once the bold headlines: 'Important Engagement. Boers Swept Back. Heavy British Losses.'

Swiftly I glanced down the long list of names in the dreaded column. The very one I shrank from encountering seemed to leap out from the page to meet my gaze. There it stood, blazoned, as it seemed to me, in bolder type than all the rest—'Laynham.'

The letters burned themselves into my brain. What tidings had they to tell of him who was dearer to me than all the world besides? I pulled myself together, and tried to fix my eyes steadily upon the announcement. There, under the heading 'Killed in Action,' I saw the name 'Lieut. the Earl of Laynham.'

I can recall nothing of what followed. The room whirled round with me; then a dark curtain fell and cut off all sense of life. 'Long afterward I learned that the servants had discovered me lying unconscious, the fatal newspaper still firmly grasped in my hand. The shock brought on a long and dangerous illness.'

As to subsequent events, my memory can not help me. I am able to recall dimly a period of hideous nightmare, in which the forms of Paul and Eve Delaval are ever prominent. Over all there seems to hang the sense of some vague, overpowering calamity from which I strive in vain to free myself. Then come

more darkness and oblivion, to be followed by renewed nightmare; while all the time I writhe in a furnace of intolerable heat, from which there is no escape.

Then I am conscious of a cooler period, and of occasional gleams of brightness, glimpses of objects which seem familiar, and the sound of well-known voices. At length comes a more complete awakening, and I know that I am in my own room, and that some one (I can not distinguish who) is seated by my bed. The scent of violets is often wafted toward me, though whence it comes I know not, nor do I try to discover.

At last, on one memorable day, I open my eyes in full consciousness. I realise that I am weak and helpless; that the silent woman in the fresh, bright dress, who lifts me up so dexterously, yet withal so tenderly, is a nurse; and that Mrs. Fenham, a bunch of violets in the bosom of her dress, is standing by the bed.

I try to speak, but the nurse puts her finger on her lips and says in a quiet voice:

'No talking yet! You must rest and grow strong.'

Days of convalescence followed, during which strength returned rapidly. Pleasant days they were too, and singularly free from care. Probably it came from the very nature of my illness that the past troubled me not at all. The oppressive burden of undefined woe, which had weighed me down when the fever was at its height, had been lifted with the return of consciousness. I knew that Paul was absent, but somehow, the thought caused me no anxiety. All details of the events of the past few months had slipped from my memory, and I was too weak as yet to try to recall them, or even to wish to do so.

One day, as I awoke from my afternoon sleep, I caught sight of another figure standing in the light of the window, close by Mrs. Fenham, who was sitting there. I had just time to recognise Eve Delaval when the figure swiftly glided from the room. As Mrs. Fenham made no allusion to Eve, I began to persuade myself that the circumstance was but a lingering trace of my fever, and mere illusion. Nevertheless, it woke up in my memory faint visions of a past in which Eve had been connected with some trouble.

Next morning, when I woke, it was with full consciousness of my overwhelming loss. Paul had been taken from me, and my life stretched out before me drear and lonely. Tears flowed abundantly, as the bitterness of my grief made itself felt. Something like hatred for the girl who had been the cause of my bereavement rose up in my heart. But I prayed desperately against it, and grace conquered. I was still weeping quietly when a light footfall sounded outside, and I opened my eyes to see Eve standing by my bedside. My heart went out in a cry of pain.

'O Eve, how could you send him to meet his death—my Paul, my only brother?'

Tears started to her eyes too, but a smile broke out on her face.

'Dear Lady Sara,' she cried, 'Paul is not dead! He is alive and well, and is coming back to you and to me.'

III.

The astounding news which Eve had so suddenly revealed, far from having any ill effect, proved a most efficacious tonic. True, the nurse, who had come upon us immediately after the disclosure, had been horrified to find us both in tears and pouring forth mutual apologies, and had banished Eve from the room with little ceremony; but, in the end, she found it more prudent to yield to my earnest entreaties for a thorough explanation. So Eve was recalled, and Mrs. Fenham came too, and all that they had to tell gave joy to my heart.

It appeared that a telegram had arrived from Paul on the very day I had been taken ill; it was intended to correct the error in the newspapers regarding his death. As soon as possible after this a letter followed, explaining how the mistake had occurred. Owing to my unconscious state at the time, it had been impossible to communicate any particulars to me; although our lawyer, who had been appealed to, advised Mrs. Fenham, who had hurried from London at the first intimation of my illness, to open both telegram and letter.

'Let me see what Paul says!' I cried impatiently, as soon as all this had been explained to me. 'I want to know all particulars. It will do me good, Nurse—for that authority began to look doubtful of the consequences.'

My petition was granted, and the documents were produced. Eagerly I opened the little brown envelope.

'Not killed. Slightly wounded.'

'Paul.'