

'Will not this make a difference, Carew?' she asked.

'Not a bit of it. We shall be as poor as church mice. We will have to live in my chambers in the Temple, very different from Rose Cottage. Still . . . I shan't complain. Miss Chapman can stay on here till we are married, I presume?'

'I think no one could object to that,' Mr. Challoner answered. 'I can truly say that I hope the money will be forthcoming in the two years.'

It seemed like a horrible jest of Aunt Lucy's. The pain and injury of it fretted Elsie Chapman's gentle heart as much as the actual loss. Aunt Lucy had had quite a different side of her character to show to Elsie than that crabbed, suspicious side which she had shown the rest of the world. She had seemed to like Carew, too. What was the meaning of it? Elsie asked herself piteously in the hours that followed the reading of the will.

Carew was a briefless barrister earning just enough to live on by dabbling in journalism and light literature. And here he was going to take a penniless girl to his already pinched hearth and home. Only for Elsie's immense faith in her lover she would have disputed his will for her now. As it was, she protested, pleaded that she might go out as a companion or a governess, anything in which she might earn a little money. But Carew only looked at her with a fond obstinacy.

'Do you think I am going to let the world have you at its mercy, my child?' he asked. 'No, no. It will be short commons with us, Elsie, but there will be Love sitting at the hearth, and, with you to inspire me, who knows what I may not do? I am going to work like a black. There are two years before Rose Cottage goes out of our reach. A great many things may happen in two years. And I have waited long enough for my wife.'

They were married in a rush of happiness in which there was no room for foreboding. It was a marriage in May, and the fig-tree was in full leaf in their Court when they came home after a dinner in a restaurant. The sympathetic French waiter who waited on them marked them down as happy lovers in his own mind. He had no sense of the significance of the little banquet, with its extravagance of a bottle of champagne. Yet they were plainly enough bride and bridegroom. For the moment there was no thought of the struggle to come with poverty and the unknown troubles of the future. For each there was only the other in the wide world; all the rest was unreal and shadowy. The world was a Garden of Eden which held just one man and one woman.

When they went home the cool breath of the river came up to meet them. It was an early summer, and there was an intoxication of scents in the air, lilac, wall-flowers, may. The London streets might have been miles away from the silence of the little court, with the mystery of night about it and the stars above it.

What a picnic the early life was! Elsie was delicate and fragile, and her husband was very unwilling that she should do work to which she was not accustomed. There was the old charwoman who had served his bachelor days well, whose services he shared with half a dozen barristers. She came in of mornings and did the rougher part of the work, after a fashion. Carew, who was very proud of his bachelor cooking, cooked Elsie's breakfast and brought her her morning cup of tea. They had the lightest of luncheons—a few sandwiches from Sweeting's, a glass of cider or lager. When they were in funds, they dined in Soho for one and six, including half a bottle of claret; when they were not they dined off a tin of preserved meat and a little fruit.

For that first year Carew worked like a madman. Very often his manuscripts came back. He used to complain that his training at Oxford and for the Bar were altogether against the lightness of touch needed by a casual journalist. He was a dark-faced, dignified-looking young man, with the face of a lawyer, people said. He was, in fact, a born lawyer, although he was yet of the briefless. The aspects of everyday things as they present themselves to the popular journalist were not the same to Carew. Yet, despite the returned manuscripts, the end of the first year found them with some money in hand; and for the rest, they had lived in the Enchanted Islands.

Such love as there was between them was bound to bring its pain and trouble. Early in the second year Carew broke down. Elsie, too, was in delicate health, expecting a baby in the autumn. The two were sick and sorry together, enduring each other's sufferings with far greater pangs than they could have felt for their own. Carew was in darkness for weeks, fretting miserably over the work that had to be left undone, in torture with his inflamed eyes. There was a doctor's bill afterwards, and the two were ordered out of London during the summer heats. When these things had been paid for the surplus has disappeared.

Carew began work again in the autumn without his former buoyancy. Elsie's ordeal hung over him like a horribly heavy cloud. He did not dare to think about it.

'If I should lose her, my God! If I should lose her!'

The words went sing-song in his brain all day. Sometimes he would glance furtively across at Elsie and tremble at her fragility. He could see the light through her fingers as she stitched at her baby-clothes. The burden of the husband, about which nobody has written, was heavy upon him. What an angel she was! Why, with her golden head and her fair paleness—she was more beautiful since the

great calm and sweetness of maternity had fallen upon her—she looked already fit for heaven. And if he lost her her death would lie at his door.

With such thoughts it was not surprising that his journalistic work lacked liveliness. The thud of the returned manuscript in the letter-box became a frequent event. He accumulated piles of unnegotiable articles, which he would put away in a drawer in an impatient fury, while Elsie looked at him with heavenly eyes of compassion and sympathy. Elsie had an unbounded admiration for Carew's work. The ingenuity with which she devised reasons for the rejection was a touching thing. She would win him out of his despondency at last, however deep it was.

'So I have you,' he would say, impassionedly, 'nothing else in the world matters.'

At last the stone was rolled out of his path. The child was born, and Elsie lived. To be sure, he had to borrow the money for the necessary expenses, but he did not care for that so it was well over. He could begin now with fresh heart and hope, now that she was back again by his side. He was oddly thrilled, too, by the possession of the small son. He was not a particularly emotional man, but the first day Elsie was back with him again, with the child on her knee, he felt as though he must fall down and praise God. Oh! the eternal mystery of the mother and the child. And to think that these belonged to him!

It was a January day, grey and bitter, when Elsie came back to their sitting-room. What matter! A rosy fire burned on the hearth. The three were shut in together from the cold and storm. Elsie had been to the gates of Death and had come back, warm and living. For the hour he felt recklessly happy. He felt able to conquer the world for his wife and son. Lunch was spread daintily, a little banquet for Elsie's return. He toasted her and the boy in a glass of wine, while she smiled at him, her happy and grateful heart in her eyes.

Presently he sat down beside her and took her hand. 'Over there by the window is a packing-case,' he said, 'which contains your Aunt Lucy's legacy. While you were ill I asked Challoner to send it. Presently I am going to open it. We were hard-set to get it up the stairs. We might as well keep it, dear. It would not fetch much, although it is a genuine antique.'

They had discussed the desk before. Carew had wanted to sell it; Elsie had desired to keep it. Even yet she had an affection for the aunt who had played her so scurvily a trick. Finally, they had compromised matters by leaving it in its dark corner at Rose Cottage. And now Carew had sent for it.

'That means——?' she said, looking at him with brave eyes.

'That we must say good-bye to Rose Cottage. It is to be sold on the 13th of April. There is not the remotest chance that we shall find the money to buy it between this and then. Can you bear it?'

'With you and him, yes,' she said.

They were both silent, thinking of the house which ought to have been theirs. Rose Cottage was one of those houses which lay hold upon the affections of their owners with such a power that we can hardly believe them to be inanimate objects. It was just outside the town, a creeper-covered cottage in a big garden on the banks of the river. The town would never overlook it, for it was caught, as it were, into the arms of a Royal park. In front the majestic river going by under magnificent trees. The cottage had a beautiful old garden, full of roses, with shady, velvety lawns, many arbors, a sun-dial, a pigeon-cote, a basin of gold fish. The house was a maze of old-fashioned rooms opening one into the other. The contents of the rooms had fascinated Elsie in childhood and in youth—all the beautiful, quaint, old-fashioned things, the curios brought from abroad, the cabinets and cases, and strange toys, and boxes of ivory and sandal-wood. The perfume of it all came back to Elsie like a whiff from the Spice Islands. Then the place had later, sweeter associations. The garden held the secret of hers and Carew's love. Oh, it was bitterly hard to think it must all go to strangers who cared nothing, knew nothing! Yet she smiled into Carew's anxious eyes.

'I am glad we shall have the old desk,' she said. 'It will be like a bit of the cottage.'

'I could have run up and down so easily,' Carew said, with one glance at the things that might have been. 'And I could have thought of you and the boy as in a little green nest while I was away from you.'

'She used to look so pleased about it all,' said Elsie. 'Poor Aunt Lucy. Something must have been wrong with her at the last. I am sure she loved us, Carew. How she would have rejoiced in the child!'

Carew jumped up. He was not yet come to the point of thinking tenderly of the late Miss Chapman.

'We'll see what the contents are,' he said.

'I know,' said Elsie; 'bundles and bundles of letters tied with blue ribbon. Aunt Lucy's love-letters. She was crossed in love; that was what made her so queer.'

'I should think she had a grudge against lovers,' muttered Carew while he plied the turncrew.

'I've thought sometimes that the poor old dear had her mind clouded a bit, and, in giving us what was dearest to herself she had an idea she was bestowing a treasure on us.'

(To be concluded.)