

LAST DAY

THE whole air of the ship is changed to-day, the serenity of the sea is gone, all the mystery of fathomless horizons; the air is already brittle with the pettiness of cities. Everything inexplicable and beloved wants to be put away, it has no place in all this practicality.

Day—the usual greedy, work-filled, light-seared, sucked-for-the-future day—is licking its paws after these night months of dreams. I can almost hear the clang of the trolleys.

But yet—but still—even yet the sea is here; there is yet that tremble under the ship and the moist sweetness of the wind—the mad moist sweetness that tempts to all the follies of our ultimate dreams.

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I am afraid; there is no use denying it, and I am tired. I have to play life for any gain I want. I have to stake myself and every fear for some possible benefit that I may dislike if obtained. I can't sit idle, my lap full of the treasures of existence, and have Fate come and barter with me for her gifts. I must instead gamble with the gods. I have only myself, and all the gorgeousness the world has is waiting to be bought.

It strangles me sometimes, this rage against a force that has dragged me into life without my consent, and yet denies the things I think make life worth living.

The very fact of working for a thing, struggling for it, sacrificing the laziness of sunshine for it, strips it of its glamour. If you have to spring up to drag down to you a bunch of grapes, they are certain to lose their bloom in the crushing hold, if

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not to break into mushy nastiness in your hand. I shall probably get my bunch of grapes, and shall no doubt just as probably only acquire a mass of useless pulp.

I want to see all the world, I want money, and I want to forget. A woman is a fool who lets one man dominate her life when once he is her lover. History, common sense tells you he will not be wholly true even if mentally faithful to you. Then take his plan of life—live as far as you can his life, and get his unprejudiced point of view.

And I am afraid of what I shall impose on myself, of the experiments I shall make myself make, of the forcing myself into the definite pose, of the rigorous insistence on the complete carrying out of the mental exploit, of the stolen freedom.

And there is no use trying to cover up the fact that what I have given him has dislocated my whole world; turned my

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universe upside down; made me afraid to read, to hear, to see, for fear some tremor of remorse or pain would spoil the sunshine for me. It hasn't. I was as strong as myself, was able to carry the weight of the thing I had done and take the benefit of the larger view. But that doesn't alter the fact that it might have paralysed my whole life.

And yet I suppose countless women do the same thing, and continue calmly in their way as though merely they had found a new fashion to dress their hair. It is an enviable temperament that can accept the facts of life, even if given in a slightly unusual manner, with the easy confidence of beings accustomed to realities. I can't; they throttle me with surprise. I hate it. I detest the fact of my being human. I loathe every limitation of existence that makes us the joke of our captors—acci-

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dent, crime, mutilation, grief, poverty, death.

If only I were not forced, if everyone were not forced, to go on living and making new experiences. If I could only embower the time, as it were, and sit and remember and know again the music that was played, the suns, the smell of the flowers, the words, the dark glimmer of the river, the trembling of the lights, the stone walls, the icy tremor of the moonlight, the touch of his hand on my bare arm—my cloak flung back—the hiss of my satin skirt on the stones, the oppression of the sun in the park, the far whisper of hushed birds; a pool of red rimming the world in the west, the perfume of the hawthorn: "You ought to read Jane Austen, and get the English view"—Jane Austen!—Oh, my love, I will go back! I love you—I love you!

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The institution of regular meals is not only more or less a pleasure, but it is advisable for preserving the sanity of the human race. To feel yourself in the throes of an immortal pain, and to have suddenly presented for your consolation cold tongue and hock and seltzer, is distinctly conducive to a reasonable adjustment to the exigencies of daily life.

I have just had my luncheon, and a luncheon on deck with the sea. The real sea flaming about you is after all, for a moment or two, a thing worth while, worth at least a few hours of pointless breathing to achieve.

I was mad to come away. I could have had the travel, ease, music; but I couldn't have been myself and stayed. It was inexorable. I wanted the knowledge. To have wondered, to have waited, to have felt myself depending more and more on him

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for all my groundspring of feeling, would have been the torture of Hell. I would have delivered myself bound over, body and soul, into bondage. I know myself. I am the same as other women. I care for him enough to know that all the false, insidious sentiment of centuries would have at last made me absolutely dependent on him for happiness.

What shall it profit—if one gain the whole world and lose his own soul? The price for my travelling would be too heavy.

I must own myself, be mistress of myself, have my emotions and pleasures ready to be taxed only at my own convenience, to be varied at my own caprice. A laboratory, a gymnasium of emotions. A glass of poetry, a taste of music, a plunge into instinct, the glamour of the sea.

But I recognise all this programme of

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variety as only a desperate effort to keep my head from going under.

I am lazy to my heart's core; how much easier to let myself be loved—to go with all the tendencies of blood and training and instinct that call to luxury, quiet, fidelity, love—than to this torturing quest of experiment. But things like this have to be kept at extremities; to relax even for a little while means to slide down towards some bleakness of remorse and regret whose clammy agony I have no intention to feel.

This way I am free from remorse; I might as well regret my height or the colour of my eyes. I make it inextricably *Myself*, and I will go in my search through Life so far that all individual things will be too hazy, too confused in the general outline to let me regret a charm that is possibly excelled by something near.

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But with all the tortuous agony I have gone through, it is only to learn that Art exceeds human passion. I could have loved much better if I had stayed with the dreams that do not need the sense of touch: the ideal Love was generated to conciliate the modesty of women.

Yet love after all is necessary. It is the thing that translates the universe to us, the insistent, omnipresent spell of creation. Though with Art we can say, "I shall love to-night," and listen to music that would ravish angels; yet it does not come to you the next morning, and say that you must stay, that you must hear it again, and again, and again, the same music from the same trumpets and drums.

THIRD PART LITTLE HUNGARY