

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

embrasure with an arched opening looking out on the harbour and the half-hoop of the Casino Terrace. The ledge is wide—wide enough to sit on without growing dizzy by looking at the depths below; and here we bring rugs and cushions and candied fruits for me, and cigarettes and books, and lounge and read and talk.

MONTE CARLO

III

April.—He wants me so much to marry him. I like him so much, the sudden rest from all struggle would be so great, that I am almost tempted to do it. It is always so easy to do the proper thing. It takes such tremendous moral courage to do what is called wrong.

He is impatient, eager, almost querulous, like all invalids; and the strain of being denied what really there is no reason I should not consent to, were it not for an unplanned, obscure goal in my own mind, is keeping him in an unnatural fever.

As he pleads, there is no reason why we should not be married at once. I have no

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one to ask, he would blot out the rest of the world as far as he is concerned, so long as he could take that villa on the way to Cap d'Œil and be married to me by the English clergyman in Nice. At once, at once—there is no reason to wait. With his love for me there may be the wish of the sick man to be free from worry, and to be quiet and petted and have the ownership of what he wants.

But surely I have earned the peace of a few weeks, the pleasure of taking up look by look the love that spreads at my feet.

I enjoy having him near me; he seems to spend his whole being in the warmth of the thing that burns him: he is clutched by it, held by it, and all the energy of his vitality is poured into a grail of passion.

People are just so much vitality, electricity, to each other. We consume or

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are consumed. Oscar drains my very veins of their blood. I am wan and attenuated after being with him. His kiss eats down in the fibre of my heart and robs a pulse from every minute.

The other to me—that staggers thought. But this thing I drink like the cup of the world's life.

Thursday.—We drove to the Eden Hotel for tea this afternoon; we got back for a couple of hours to the Garden of Eden. We passed the villa on the way with its closed windows and wallflower blossom enclosure, and the shimmer of the blue enamel of the Mediterranean through the rows of cypress trees at the foot of the garden on the edge of the cliff. It would be peace well enough; his hand groped for mine and I let him find it. Perfume and the sun always subdue me like the beat of music. How the policy

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of nations would be inverted if symphonies were played during Cabinet meetings! Even to men who were unconscious of the beauty, who only heard it like the rattle of the streets, calculated rhythm and intervals would unconsciously control their blood. Sound is physical, the sun and perfume and silence of gardens are physical, and bind us like bands and lead us like the promise of passionate eyes.

When we came, though, to a curve in the road, our carriage stopped and the coachman raised his hat. A funeral—the coffin carried on an open bier—was swaying slowly through the gate of a hidden cemetery. I drew my hand away, and the bitter chill that any recognition of the facts of humanity always brings to me settled over the sun and filled the air with the odour of dead things and the cry of universal pain. The pain-linked world, it poisoned the clinging of his fingers; to

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other women that meant marriage, children, more pain, more lives to agonise. It was a trick, this love—a blind, a baited hook, the glare of plumage on birds, the mane of beasts, the veil of lies on humanity.

I did not want to go inside when we came to the hotel. I wanted the illusion of the air yet, the vision moments of the flower-separated sky and sea. We went silently down a row of broad steps bordered by a low wall covered with flame-coloured nasturtiums. At the foot was a ruined Grecian temple where the nasturtiums dripped their vermilion glory from the shattered plinth to the pedestal; the blood of many sacrifices to distant gods flowered in perpetual oblation. Behind a clump of olive trees and cactus there was a round corner jutting out to the sea and overgrown with white hawthorn and heliotrope. We drew our chairs

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there, the deep lounging wicker chairs that yield and yet let the air touch you, and I leaned back, my hat off, and Tom lighted my cigarettes for me. We did not talk very much or break the transfigured afternoon; we let the gods lend us a glimpse of Eden.

I was happy, utterly happy for the moment. I am very fond of Tom, and Nature makes her illusions beautifully. There is no doubt about it, while they last they are Paradise regained.

The moments went by like the spray of fountains that have been set to play in the sun; and even when we rose to go Tom touched my arm and pointed to the tiny jewelled bay scintillating with reflected suns, to the white pillars of a temple half hidden in a grove on the further shore, and told me some story of a man cast on an Italian island, who loved some girl there and rowed out on the bay in

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the glittering nights with her, with the "desire of his heart." With the desire of his heart! The nasturtiums waved their flame to our feet as we passed up the steps reluctantly, slowly, or pausing now and then to look back, or now to draw closer together when the spray of other flowers would sway over the balustrade and tempt us to lean to their fragrance.

And that night I told him I could never marry him. After the long, silent drive back I asked to be alone for a while, and then on the Terrace, when the place was all silent and closed, I came out as I had done the first time, and I asked him to go away, to leave me—that I wanted my life to myself.

Friday.—He left this morning. A note was brought to me to say he had gone to Arcahon, that he would come back whenever I wanted him.

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The South seemed rather empty to me this morning; and strangely, for the first time in weeks the sky is grey, the water like heaving lead, and a cold, ugly rain comes down now and then. I have had a fire built in my room; it warms my heart; it is one of the elements anyway, and I must get back to living with the elements, not to these grasping, disturbing human ties.

It is blanker than I thought, and I am glad to be alone. But suddenly life has come to a standstill. Even when the sun shines it presses on my eyes and pains them. There is an oppression over everything, and the blood of the Southern spring seems thick.

CAIRO

Shepherd's Hotel, May.—I wanted to be so dominated by the sun that there would be no flame in me that it would not consume, and Egypt had meant to me the very centre of the South.

There is no reality of glamour in the world; we must give from ourselves all the glamour existence possesses.

From underneath my window comes the penetrating scream of the pelican, the fountains are standing half waterless in the blazing pallid garden, the air is imprisoned in light, a desert made transparent, and enclosing the world in dry, sun glare. The moisture of life is out of realisation.

The darkened room is wired in by heat;