

die so deathly hard. I have seen a man — No, I was sure of that. She would not suffer any more now.

I lay thinking. Would Isaacs send for me when he returned, or would he face his grief alone for a night before he spoke? The latter, I thought; I hoped so too. How little sympathy there must be for any one, even the dearest, in our souls and hearts, when it is so hard to look forward to speaking half-a-dozen words of comfort to some poor wretch of a friend who has lost everything in the wide world that is dear to him. We would rather give him all we possess outright than attempt to console him for the loss. And yet — what is there in life more sweet than to be consoled and comforted, and to have the true sympathy of some one, even a little near to us, when we ourselves are suffering. The people we do not want shower cards of condolence on us, and carriage-loads of flowers on the poor dead thing; the ones who could be of some help to the tortured soul are afraid to speak; the very delicacy of kind-heartedness in them, which makes us wish they would come, makes them stay away.

I hope Isaacs will not send for me, poor fellow.

If he does, what shall I say? God help me.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE hours came and went, and though worn out with the exertions of the past days, and with the emotions of the morning, I lay in my rooms, unable to sleep even for a moment. I went down once or twice to Isaacs' rooms to know whether he had returned, but he had not, nor had any one heard from him. At last the evening shadows crept stealthily up, darkening first one room, then another, until there was not light enough to read by. Then I dropped my book and went out to breathe the cold air on the verandah. Warily the hours went by, and still there was no sign of my friend.

Towards eleven o'clock the moon, now waning, once more rose above the hills and shed her light across the lawn, splendid still, but with the first tinge of melancholy that clouds her departing glory. Exhausted nature asserted herself, and chilled to the bone I went to bed, and, at last, to sleep.

I slept peacefully at first, but soon the events that had come over my life began to weave themselves in wild disharmony through my restful visions, and the events that were to come cast their lengthening shadows before them. The world of past, present,

and future thoughts, came into my soul, distorted, without perspective, nothing to help me to discern the good from the evil, the suffering gone and long-forgotten from the pain in store. The triumph of discrepancy over waking reason, the fancied victories of the sleep-dulled intellect over the outrageous discord of the wakeful imagination. I passed a most miserable night. It seemed rest to wake, until I was awake, and then it seemed rest to sleep again, until my eyes were closed. At last it came, no dream this time; Isaacs stood by my bed-side in the gray of the morning, himself grayer than the soft neutral-tinted dawn. It was a terrible moment to me, though I had expected it since yesterday. I felt like the condemned criminal in France, who does not know the day or hour of his death. The first intimation is when the executioner at daybreak enters his cell and bids him come forth to die, sometimes in less than sixty seconds from his waking.¹

How gray he looked, and how infinitely tried. I rose swiftly and took his hands, which were deadly cold, and led him to the outer room. I could not say anything, for I did not know how such a terribly sudden blow would affect him; he was so unlike any one else. Why is it so hard to comfort the afflicted? Why should the most charitable duty it is ever given us to perform be, without exception, the hardest of tasks?

I am sure most people feel as I do. It is far less painful to suffer wounds and sickness in one's own

¹ A fact, as is well known.

body than to stand by and see the cold clean knife go through skin and flesh and cartilage; it is surely easier to suffer disease than to smooth daily and hourly the bed and pillows of some poor tormented wretch, calling on God and man to end his misery. There is a hidden instinct—of a low and cowardly kind, but human nevertheless—which bids us turn away from spectacles of agony whether harrowing or repulsive, until the good angel comes and whispers that we must trample on such coarse impulse and do our duty. "Show pity," said the wise old Frenchman, "do anything to alleviate distress, but avoid actually feeling either compassion or sympathy. They can lead to no good." That was only his way of making to himself an excuse for doing a good action, for Larochevoucauld was a man who really possessed every virtue that he disclaimed for himself and denied in others.

I felt much of this as I led Isaacs to the outer room, not knowing what form his sorrow might take, but feeling in my own person a grief as poignant, perhaps, for the moment, as his own. I had known he would come, that was all, though I had hoped he would not, and I knew that I must do my best to send him away a little less sorrowful than he had come. I was not prepared for the extreme calm of voice and manner that marked his first words, coming with measured rhythm and even cadence from his pale lips.

"It is all over, my friend," he said.

"It has but begun," said the solemn tones of Ram Lal, the Buddhist, from the door. He entered and approached us.

"Friend Isaacs," he continued, "I am not here to mock at your grief or to weary your strained heart-strings with such petty condolence as well-nigh drove Ayoub of old to impatience. But I love you, my brother, and I have somewhat to say to you in your trouble, some advice to give you in your distress. You are suffering greatly, past the power of reason to alleviate, for you no longer know yourself, nor are aware what you really think. But I will show to you three pictures of yourself that shall rouse you to what you are, to what you were, and to what you shall be.

"I found you, not many years ago, a very young man, most exceptionally placed in regard to the world. You were even then rich, though not so rich as you now are. You were beautiful and full of vigour, but you have now upon you the glow of a higher beauty, the overflowing promise of a more glorious life. You were happy because you thought you were, but such happiness as you had proceeded from without rather than from within. You were a materially thinking man. Your thoughts were of the flesh, and your delights — harmless it is true — were in the things that were under your eyes — wealth, power, book knowledge, and perhaps woman, if you can call the creatures you believed in women.

"You gathered wealth in great heaps, and your

precious stones in storehouses. You laid your hand upon the diamond of the river and upon the pearl of the sea, and they abode with you, as the light of the sun and the moon. And you said, 'Behold it is my star, which is the lord of the dog-heat in summer, and it is my kismet.' You also took to yourself wives of rare qualities, having both golden and raven black hair, whose skin was as fine silk, and their breath as the freshness of the dawning, and their eyes as jewels. Then said you, rejoicing in your heart, that you were happy; and so you dwelt in peace and plenty, and waxed glad.

"Therefore you accomplished your first destiny, and you drank of the cup that was filled to overflowing. And if it had been the law of nature that from pleasure man should derive permanent lasting peace, you had been happy so long as you lived. But, though you have the faultless life of the body to enjoy all things of the earth, even as other men, though in another degree, you have within you something more. There is in your breast a heart beating — an organ so wonderful in its sensitiveness, so perfect in its consciousness of good, that the least throb and thrill of pleasure that it feels is worth years and ages of mere sensual life enjoyment. The body having tasted of all happiness whereof it is capable, and having found that it is good, is saturated with its own ease and enjoys less keenly. But the heart is the borderland between body and soul. The heart can love and the body can love, but the body can only love itself; the

heart is the wellspring of the love that goes beyond self. Therefore your heart awoke.

"Shall I tell you of the first early stirrings of your love? Think you, because I am gray and loveless, that I have never known youth and gladness of heart? Ah, I know, better than you can think. It is not sudden, really, the blossoming out of the tree of life. The small leaves grow larger and stronger though still closely folded in the bud, until the bright warmth of the spring makes them burst into bloom. The little lark in the nest among the grass grows beneath the mother's wing and idly moves, now and then, unconscious of the cloud-cleaving gift of flight, until all at once, in the fair dawning, there wells up in his tiny breast the mighty sense of power to rise.

"The human heart is like the budded folded leaves, and like the untaught lark. The quiet sleep before the day of blooming is, while it lasts, a state of happiness. But it is not comparable with the breathing joy of the leaf that feels and sees the wonderful life around it, whispering divine answers to the wooing breeze. The humble nest where it has first seen light is for many days a happy home to the tender songster, soon left behind, when the first wing-strokes waft the small body upwards to the sky, and forgotten as the first glad trill and quaver of the new-found voice roll out the prelude to the glorious life-long hymn of praise. The heart of man — your heart, my dear friend — gave a great leap from earth to sky, when first it felt the magic of the other life. The

grosser scales of material vision fell away from your inner sight on the day when you met, and knew you had met, the woman you were to love.

"I found you again, a different man, a far happier man, though you would hardly allow that. A sweet uncertainty of the future half-tinged your joy with a shadow of sadness, which you had not known before: but love sadness is only the shading and gentle pencilling in love's wondrous picture, whereby the whole light of the painting is made clearer and stronger. A new world opened out before you in endless vistas of untold and undreamed bliss. You looked back at your former self, so careless and sunny, so consciously happy in the strong sense of life and power, and you wondered how you could have been even contented through so many years. The good and evil deeds of your past life lost colour and perspective, and fell back into a dull, flat background, against which the ineffable vision of beautiful and immortal womanhood stood forth in transcendent glory. The eternal womanly element of the great universe beckoned you on, as it did Doctor Faustus of old. You had hitherto accepted woman and ignored womanhood, as so many of the followers of the prophet have always done. Henceforth there was to be a change, entire, complete, and enduring. No doubts now, or careless scepticism; no cant about women having no souls and no individual being; you had made a great step to a better understanding of the world you live in. Filled with a new life, you