him which the daily life of eight years, with its growing self-surrender, its expanding spiritual force, had graven on her mind, clashed so oddly with all that he was saying! A certain desolate feeling, too large and deep in all its issues to be harboured long in her slight nature, came over her now and then. She had been so near to him all these years, and had yet known nothing. It was the separateness of the individual lot—that awful and mysterious chasm which divides even lover from lover—which touched her here and there like a cold hand, from which she shrank.

She grew a little cold and pale when he spoke of his weeks of despair, of the death from which Ancrum had rescued him. But any ordinary prudish word of blame, even for his silence towards her, never occurred to her. Once she asked him a wistful question :—

'You and she thought that marrying didn't matter at all when people loved each other—that nobody had a right to interfere? Do you think that now, David?'

'No,' he said, with deep emphasis. '*No.*—I have come to think the most disappointing and hopeless marriage, nobly borne, to be better worth having than what people call an "ideal passion,"—if the ideal passion must be enjoyed at the expense of one of those fundamental rules which poor human nature has worked out, with such infinite difficulty and pain, for the protection and help of its own weakness. I did not know it,—but, so far as in me lay, I was betraying and injuring that society which has given me all I have.'

She sat silent. '*The most disappointing marriage.*' An echo from that overheard talk at Benet's Park floated through her mind. She winced, and shrank, even as she realised his perfect innocence of any such reference.

Then, with eagerness, she threw herself into innumerable questions about Elise—her looks, her motives, the details of what she said and did. Beneath the satisfaction of her curiosity, of course, there was all the time a pang—a pang not to be silenced. In her flights of idle fancy she had often suspected something not unlike the truth, basing her conjecture on the mystery which had always hung round that Paris visit, partly on the world's general experience of what happened to handsome young men. For, in her heart of hearts, had there not lurked all the time a wonder which was partly self-judgment? Had David, with such a temperament, never been more deeply moved than she knew herself to have moved him? More than once a secret inarticulate suspicion of this kind had crossed her. The poorest and shallowest soul may have these flashes of sad insight, under the kindling of its affections.

But now she *knew*, and the difference was vast. After she had asked all her questions, and delivered a vehement protest against the tenacity of his self-reproach with regard to Louie—for what decent girl need go wrong unless she has a mind to?—she laid her head down again on David's knee.

'I don't think she cared much about you—I'm sure she couldn't have,' she said slowly, finding a certain pleasure in the words.

David did not answer. He was sunk in memory. How far away lay that world of art and the artist from this dusty, practical life in which he was now immersed! At no time had he been really akin to it. The only art to which he was naturally susceptible was the art of oratory and poetry. Elise had created in him an artificial taste, which had died with his passion. Yet now, as his quickened mind lingered in the past, he felt a certain wide philosophic regret for the complete divorce which had come about between him and so rich a section of human experience.

He was roused from his reverie, which would have reassured her, could she have followed it, more than any direct speech, by a movement from Lucy. Dropping the hand which had once more stolen over his brow, he saw her looking at him with wide, wet eyes.

'David!'

'Yes.'

'Come here! close to me!'

He moved forward, and laid his arm round her shoulders, as she sat in her low chair beside him.

'What is it, dear? I have been keeping you up too late.'

She lifted a hand, and brought his face near to hers.

'David, I am a stupid little thing—but I do understand more than I did, and I would never, *never* desert you for anything,—for any sorrow or trouble in the world!'

The mixture of yearning, pain, triumphant affection in her tone, cannot be rendered in words.

His whole heart melted to her. As he held her to his breast, the hour they had just passed through took for both of them a sacred meaning and importance. Youth was going—their talk had not been the talk of youth. Was true love just beginning?

CHAPTER VIII

'*My God! My God!*'

The cry was David's. He had reeled back against the table in his study, his hand upon an open book, his face turned to Doctor Mildmay, who was standing by the fireplace.

'Of course, I can't be sure,' said the doctor hastily, almost guiltily. 'You must not take it on my authority alone. Try and throw it off your mind. Take your wife up to town to see Selby or Paget, and if I am wrong I shall be too thankful! And, above all, don't frighten her. Take care—she will be down again directly.'

'You say,' said David, thickly, 'that if it were what you suspect, operation would be difficult. Yes, I see there is something of the sort here.'

He turned, shaking all over, to the book beside him, which

was a medical treatise he had just taken down from his scientific bookcase.

'It would be certainly difficult,' said the doctor, frowning, his lower lip pushed forward in a stress of thought, 'but it would have to be attempted. Only, on the temporal bone it will be a puzzle to go deep enough.'

David's eye ran along the page beside him. 'Sarcoma, which was originally regarded with far less terror than cancer (carcinoma), is now generally held by doctors to be more malignant and more deadly. There is much less pain, but surgery can do less, and death is in most cases infinitely more rapid.'

'Hush!' said the doctor, with short decision, 'I hear her coming down again. Let me speak.'

Lucy, who had run upstairs to quiet a yell of crying from Sandy immediately after Doctor Mildmay had finished his examination of her swollen cheek, opened the door as he spoke. She was slightly flushed, and her eyes were more wide open and restless than usual. David was apparently bending over a drawer which he had opened on the farther side of his writing-table. The doctor's face was entirely as usual.

'Well now, Mrs. Grieve,' he said cheerily, 'we have been agreeing—your husband and I—that it will be best for you to go up to London and have that cheek looked at by one of the crack surgeons. They will give you the best advice as to what to do with it. It is not a common ailment, and we are very fine fellows down here, but of course we can't get the experience, in a particular line of cases, of one of the first-rate surgical specialists. Do you think you could go to-morrow? I could make an appointment for you by telegraph to-day.'

Lucy gave a little unsteady, affected laugh.

'I don't see how I can go all in a moment like that,' she said. 'It doesn't matter! Why don't you give me something for it, and it will go away.'

'Oh! but it does matter,' said the doctor, firmly. 'Lumps like that are serious things, and mustn't be trifled with.'

'But what will they want to do to it?' said Lucy nervously. She was standing with one long, thin hand resting lightly on the back of a chair, looking from David, whose face and figure were blurred to her by the dazzle of afternoon light coming in through the window, to Doctor Mildmay.

The doctor cleared his throat.

'They would only want to do what was best for you in every way,' he said; 'you may be sure of that. Could you be very brave if they advised you that it ought to be removed?'

She gave a little shriek.

'What! you mean cut it out—cut it away!' she cried, shaking, and looking at him with the frowning anger of a child. 'Why, it would leave an ugly mark, a hideous mark!'

'No, it wouldn't. The mark would disfigure you much less than the swelling. They would take care to draw the skin together again neatly, and you could easily arrange your hair a little. But you ought to get a first-rate opinion.'

'What is it? what do you call it?' said Lucy, irritably. 'I can't think why you make such a fuss.'

'Well, it might be various things,' he said evasively. 'Any way, you take my advice, and have it seen to. I can telegraph as I go from here.'

'I could take you up to-morrow,' said David, coming forward in answer to the disturbed look she threw him. Now that her flush had faded, how pale and drooping she was in the strong light! 'It would be better, dear, to do what Doctor Mildmay recommends. And you never mind a day in London, you know.'

Did she detect any difference in the voice? She moved up to him, and he put his arm round her.

'Must I?' she said, helplessly; 'it's such a bore, to-morrow particularly. I had promised to take Sandy out to tea.'

'Well, let that young man go without a treat for once,' said the doctor, laughing. 'He has a deal too many, anyway. Very well, that's settled. I will telegraph as I go to the train. Just come here a moment, Grieve.'

The two went out together. When David returned, any one who had happened to be in the hall would have seen that he could hardly open the sitting-room door, so fumbling were his movements. As he passed through the room to reach the study he caught sight of his own face in a glass, and stopping, with clenched hands, pulled himself together by the effort of his whole being.

When he opened the study-door, Lucy was hunting about his table in a quick, impatient way.

'I can't think where you keep your indiarubber rings, David. I want to put one round a parcel for Dora.'

He found one for her. Then she stood by the fire, as the sunset-light faded into dusk, and poured out to him a story of domestic grievances. Sarah, their cook, wished to leave and be married—it was very unexpected and very inconsiderate, and Lucy did not believe the young man was steady; and how on earth was she to find another cook? It was enough to drive one wild, the difficulty of getting cooks in Manchester.

For nearly an hour, till the supper-bell rang, she stood there, with her foot on the fender, chattering in a somewhat sharp, shrill way. Not one word would she say, or let him say, of London or the doctor's visit.

After supper, as they went back into the study, David looked for the railway-guide. 'The 10.15 will do,' he said. 'Mildmay has made the appointment for three. We can just get up in time.'

'It is great nonsense!' said Lucy, pouting. 'The question is, can we get back? I must get back. I don't want to leave Sandy for the night. He's got a cold.'

It seemed to David that something clutched at his breath and voice. Was it he or some one else that said:—

'That will be too tiring, dear. We shall have to stay the night.'

'No, I *must* get back,' said Lucy, obstinately.

Afterwards she brought her work as usual, and he professed to smoke and read. But the evening passed, for him, beneath his outward quiet, in a hideous whirl of images and sensations, which ultimately wore itself out, and led to a mood of dulness and numbness. Every now and then, as he sat there, with the fire crackling, and the familiar walls and books about him, he felt himself sinking, as it were, in a sudden abyss of horror; then, again, the scene of the afternoon seemed to him absurd, and he despised his own panic. He dwelt upon everything the doctor had said about the rarity, the exceptional nature of such an illness. Well, what is rare does not happen—not to oneself—that was what he seemed to be clinging to at last.

When Lucy went up to bed, he followed her in about a quarter of an hour.

'Why, you are early!' she said, opening her eyes.

'I am tired,' he said. 'There was a great press of work to-day. I want a long night.'

In reality, he could not bear her out of his sight. Hour after hour he tossed restlessly, beside her quiet sleep, till the spring morning broke.

They left Manchester next morning in a bitter east wind. As she passed through the hall to the cab, Lucy left a little note for Dora on the table, with instructions that it should be posted.

'I want her to come and see him at his bedtime,' she said, 'for of course we can't get back for that.'

David said nothing. When they got to the station, he dared not even propose to her the extra comfort of first class, lest he should intensify the alarm he perfectly well divined under her offhand, flighty manner.

By three o'clock they were in the waiting-room of the famous doctor they had come to see. Lucy looked round her nervously as they entered, with quick, dilating nostrils, and across David there swept a sudden choking memory of the trapped and fluttering birds he had sometimes seen in his boyhood struggling beneath a birdcatcher's net on the moors.

As the appointment was at an unusual time, they were not kept waiting very long by the great man. He received them with a sort of kindly distance, made his examination very quickly, and asked her a number of general questions, entering the answers in his large patients' book.

Then he leant back in his chair, looking thoughtfully at Lucy over his spectacles.

'Well,' he said at last, with a perfectly cheerful and business-like voice, 'I am quite clear there is only one thing to be done, Mrs. Grieve. You must have that growth removed.'

Lucy flushed.

'I want you to give me something to take it away,' she said, half sullenly, half defiantly. She was sitting very erect, in a little tight-fitting black jacket, with her small black hat and veil on her knee.

'No, I am sorry to say nothing can be done in that way. If you were my daughter or sister, I should say to you, have that lump removed without a day's, an hour's unnecessary delay. These growths are not to be trifled with.'

He spoke with a mild yet penetrating observance of her. A number of reflections were passing rapidly through his mind. The operation was a most unpromising one, but it was clearly the surgeon's duty to try it. The chances were that it would prolong life which was now speedily and directly threatened, owing to the proximity of the growth to certain vital points.

'When could you do it?' said David, so hoarsely that he had to repeat his question. He was standing with his arm on the mantelpiece, looking down on the surgeon and his wife.

The great man lifted his eyebrows, and looked at his engagement-book attentively.

'I *could* do it to-morrow,' he said at last; 'and the sooner, the better. Have you got lodgings? or can I help you? And—'

Then he stopped, and looked at Lucy. 'Let me settle things with your husband, Mrs. Grieve,' he said, with a kindly smile. 'You look tired after your journey. You will find a fire and some newspapers in the waiting-room.'

And, with a suavity not to be gainsaid, he ushered her himself across the hall, and shut the waiting-room door upon her. Then he came back to David.

A little while after a bell rang, and the man-servant who answered it presently took some brandy into the consulting-room. Lucy meanwhile sat, in a dazed way, looking out of window at the square garden, where the lilacs were already in full leaf in spite of the east wind.

When her husband and the doctor came in she sprang up, looking partly awkward, partly resentful. Why had they been discussing it all without her?

'Well, Mrs. Grieve,' said the doctor, 'your husband is just going to take you on to see the lodgings I recommend. By good luck they are just vacant. Then, if you like them, you know, you can settle in at once.'

'But I haven't brought anything for the night,' cried Lucy in an injured voice, looking at David.

'We will telegraph to Dora, darling,' he said, taking up her bag and umbrella from the table; 'but now we mustn't keep Mr. Selby. He has to go out.'

'How long will it take?' interrupted Lucy, addressing the surgeon. 'Can I get back next day?'

'Oh no! you will have to be four or five days in town. But don't alarm yourself, Mrs. Grieve. You won't know anything at all about the operation itself; your husband will look after you,

and then a little patience—and hope for the best. Now I really must be off. Good-bye to you—good-bye to you.'

And he hurried off, leaving them to find their own cab. When they got in, Lucy said, passionately :—

'I want to go back, David. I want Sandy. I won't go to these lodgings.'

Then courage came to him. He took her hand.

'Dear, dear wife—for my sake—for Sandy's!'

She stared at him—at his white face.

'Shall I die?' she cried, with the same passionate tone.

'No, no, no!' he said, kissing the quivering hand, and seeing no one but her in the world, though they were driving through the crowd of Regent Street. 'But we must do everything Mr. Selby said. That hateful thing must be taken away—it is so near—think for yourself!—to the eye and the brain; and it might go downwards to the throat. You will be brave, won't you? We will look after you so—Dora and I.'

Lucy sank back in the cab, with a sudden collapse of nerve and spirit. David hung over her, comforting her, one moment promising her that in a few days she should have Sandy again, and be quite well; the next, checked and turned to stone by the memory of the terrible possibilities freely revealed to him in his private talk with Mr. Selby, and by the sense that he might be soothing the present only to make the future more awful.

'David! she is in such fearful pain! The nurse says she must have more morphia. They didn't give her enough. Will you run to Mr. Selby's house? You won't find him, of course—he is on his round—but his assistant, who was with him here just now, went back there. Run for him at once.'

It was Dora who spoke, as she closed the folding-doors of the inner room where Lucy lay. David, who was crouching over the fire in the sitting-room, whither the nurse had banished him for a while, after the operation, sprang up, and disappeared in an instant. Those faint, distant sounds of anguish which had been in his ear for half an hour or more, ever since the doctors had departed, declaring that everything was satisfactorily over, had been more than his manhood could bear.

He returned in an incredibly short space of time with a young surgeon, who at once administered another injection of morphia.

'A highly sensitive patient,' he said to David, 'and the nerves have, no doubt, been badly cut. But she will do now.'

And, indeed, the moaning had ceased. She lay with closed eyes—so small a creature in the wide bed—her head and face swathed in bandages. But the breathing was growing even and soft. She was once more unconscious.

The doctor touched David's hand and went, after a word with the nurse.

'Won't you go into the next room, sir, and have your tea? Mrs. Grieve is sure to sleep now,' said the nurse to him in her compassion.

He shook his head, and sat down near the foot of the bed. The nurse went into the dressing-room a moment to speak to Dora, who was doing some unpacking there, and he was left alone with his wife.

The sounds of the street came into the silent room, and every now and then he had a start of agony, thinking that she was moving again—that she was in pain again. But no, she slept; her breath came gently through the childish parted lips, and the dim light—for the nurse had drawn the curtains on the lengthening April day—hid her pallor and the ghastliness of the dressings.

Forty-eight hours ago, and they were in the garden with Sandy! And now life seemed to have passed for ever into this half-light of misery. Everything had dropped away from him—the interests of his business, his books, his social projects. He and she were shut out from the living world. Would she ever rise from that bed again—ever look at him with the old look?

He sat on there, hour after hour, till Dora coaxed him into the sitting-room for a while, and tried to make him take some food. But he could not touch it, and how the sudden gas which the servant lit glared on his sunken eyes! He waited on his companion mechanically, then sat, with his head on his hand, listening for the sound of the doctors' steps.

When they came, they hardly disturbed their patient. She moaned at being touched; but everything was right, and the violent pain which had unexpectedly followed the operation was not likely to recur.

'And what a blessing that she took the chloroform so well, with hardly any after-effects!' said Mr. Selby cheerily, drawing on his gloves in the sitting-room. 'Well, Mr. Grieve, you have got a good nurse, and can leave your wife to her with perfect peace of mind. You must sleep, or you will knock up; let me give you a sleeping draught.'

'Oh! I shall sleep,' said David, impatiently. 'You considered the operation successful—completely succcessful?'

The surgeon looked gravely into the fire.

'I shall know more in a week or so,' he said. 'I have never disguised from you, Mr. Grieve, how serious and difficult the case was. Still, we have done what was right—we can but wait for the issue.'

An hour later Dora looked into the sitting-room, and said softly :—

'She would like to see you, David.'

He went in, holding his breath. There was a night-light in the room, and her face was lying in deep shadow.

He knelt down beside her, and kissed her hand.

'My darling!' he said—and his voice was quite firm and steady—'are you easier now?'

'Yes,' she said faintly. 'Where are you going to sleep?'

'In a room just beyond Dora's room. She could make me hear in a moment if you wanted me.'

Then, as he looked closer, he saw that about her head was thrown the broad white lace scarf she had worn round her neck on the journey up. And as he bent to her, she suddenly opened her languid eyes, and gazed at him full. For the moment it was as though she were given back to him.

'I made Dora put it on,' she said feebly, moving her hand towards the lace. 'Does it hide all those nasty bandages?'

'Yes. I can't see them at all.'

'Is it pretty?'

The little gleam of a smile nearly broke down his self-command.

'Very,' he said, with a quivering lip.

She closed her eyes again.

'Oh! I hope Lizzie will look after Sandy,' she said after a while, with a long sigh.

Not a word now of wilfulness, of self-assertion! After the sullenness and revolt of the day before, which had lasted intermittently almost up to the coming of the doctors, nothing could be more speaking, more pathetic, than this helpless acquiescence.

'I mustn't stay with you,' he said. 'You ought to be going to sleep again. Nurse will give you something if you can't.'

'I'm quite comfortable,' she said, sleepily. 'There isn't any pain.'

And she seemed to pass quickly and easily into sleep as he sat looking at her.

An hour or two later, Dora, who could not sleep from the effects of fatigue and emotion, was lying in her uncomfortable stretcher-bed, thinking with a sort of incredulity of all that had passed since David's telegram had reached her the day before, or puzzling herself to know how her employers could possibly spare her for another three or four days' holiday, when she was startled by some recurrent sounds from the room beyond her own. David was sleeping there, and Dora, with her woman's quickness, had at once perceived that the partition between them was very thin, and had been as still as a mouse in going to bed.

The sound alarmed her, though she could not make it out. Instinctively she put her ear to the wall. After a minute or two she hastily moved away, and hiding her head under the bedclothes, fell to soft crying and praying.

For it was the deep rending sound of suppressed weeping, the weeping of a strong man who believes himself alone with his grief and with God. That she should have heard it at all filled her with a sort of shame.

Things, however, looked much brighter on the following morning. The wound caused by the operation was naturally sore and stiff, and the dressing was painful; but when the

doctor's visit was over, and Lucy was lying in the halo of her white scarf on her fresh pillows, in a room which Dora and the nurse had made daintily neat and straight, her own cheerfulness was astonishing. She made Dora go out and get her some patterns for Sandy's summer suits, and when they came she lay turning them over from time to time, or weakly twisting first one and then another round her finger. She was, of course, perpetually anxious to know when she would be well, and whether the scar would be very bad; but on the whole she was a docile and promising patient, and she even began to see some gleams of virtue in Mr. Selby, for whom at first she had taken the strongest dislike.

Meanwhile, David, haunted always by a horrible knowledge which was hid from her, could get nothing decided for the future out of the doctors.

'We must wait,' said Mr. Selby; 'for the present all is healing well, but I wish we could get up her general strength. It must have been running down badly of late.'

Whereupon David was left reproaching himself for blindness and neglect, the real truth being that, with any one of Lucy's thin elastic frame and restless temperament, a good deal of health-degeneration may go on without its becoming conspicuous.

A few days passed. Dora was forced to go back to work; but as she was to take up her quarters at the Merton Road house, and to write long accounts of Sandy to his mother every day, Lucy saw her depart with considerable equanimity. Dora left her patient on the sofa, a white and ghostly figure, but already talking eagerly of returning to Manchester in a week. When she heard the cab roll off, Lucy lay back on her cushions and counted the minutes till David should come in from the British Museum, whither, because of her improvement, he had gone to clear up one or two bibliographical points. She caressed the thought of being left alone with him, except for the nurse—left to that tender and special care he was bestowing on her so richly, and through which she seemed to hold and know him afresh.

When he came in she reproached him for being late, and both enjoyed and scouted his pleas in answer.

'Well, I don't care,' she said obstinately; 'I wanted you.'

Then she heaved a long sigh.

'David, I made nurse let me look at the horrid place this morning. I shall always be a fright—it's no good.'

But he knew her well enough to perceive that she was not really very downcast, and that she had already devised ways and means of hiding the mark as much as possible.

'It doesn't hurt or trouble you at all?' he asked her anxiously.

'No, of course not,' she said impatiently. 'It's getting well. Do ask nurse to bring me my tea.'

The nurse brought it, and she and David spoiled their invalid with small attentions.

'It's nice being waited on,' said Lucy when it was over, settling herself to rest with a little sigh of sensuous satisfaction.

Another week passed, and all seemed to be doing well, though Mr. Selby would say nothing as yet of allowing her to move. Then came a night when she was restless; and in the morning the wound troubled her, and she was extremely irritable and depressed. The moment the nurse gave him the news at his door in the early morning, David's face changed. He dressed, and went off for Mr. Selby, who came at once.

'Yes,' he said gravely, after his visit, as he shut the folding-doors of Lucy's room behind him—'yes, I am sorry to say there is a return. Now the question is, what to do.'

He came and stood by the fireplace, legs apart, head down, debating with himself. David, haggard and unshorn, watched him helplessly.

'We *could* operate again,' he said thoughtfully, 'but it would cut her about terribly. And I can't disguise from you, Mr. Grieve'—as he raised his head and caught sight of his companion his tone softened insensibly—'that, in my opinion, it would be all but useless. I more than suspect, from my observation to-day, that there are already secondary growths in the lung. Probably they have been there for some time.'

There was a silence.

'Then we can do nothing,' said David.

'Nothing effectual, alas!' said the doctor, slowly. 'Palliatives, of course, we can use, of many kinds. But there will not be much pain.'

'Will it be long?'

David was standing with his back to the doctor, looking out of window, and Mr. Selby only just heard the words.

'I fear it will be a rapid case,' he said reluctantly. 'This return is rapid, and there are many indications this morning I don't like. But don't wish it prolonged, my dear sir!—have courage for her and yourself.'

The words were not mere platitudes—the soul of a good man looked from the clear and masterful eyes. He described the directions he had left with the nurse, and promised to come again in the evening. Then he grasped David's hand, and would have gone away quickly. But David, following him mechanically to the door, suddenly recollected himself.

'Could we move her?' he asked; 'she may crave to get home, or to some warm place.'

'Yes, you can move her,' the doctor said, decidedly. 'With an invalid-carriage and a nurse you can do it. We will talk about it when I come again to-night.'

'A ghastly case,' he was saying to himself as he went downstairs, 'and, thank heaven! a rare one. Strange and mysterious thing it is, with its ghoulish preference for the young. Poor thing! poor thing! and yesterday she was so cheerful—she would tell me all about her boy.'

CHAPTER IX

THE history of the weeks that followed shall be partly told in David's own words, gathered from those odds-and-ends of paper, old envelopes, the half-sheets of letters, on which he would write sometimes in those hours when he was necessarily apart from Lucy, thrusting them on his return between the leaves of his locked journal, clinging to them as the only possible record of his wife's ebbing life, yet passionately avoiding the sight of them when they were once written.

'RYDAL, AMBLESIDE: *May 5th.*—We arrived this afternoon. The day has been glorious. The mountains round the head of the lake, as we drove along it at a foot's pace that the carriage might not shake her, stood out in the sun; the light wind drove the cloud-shadows across their blues and purples; the water was a sheet of light; the larches were all out, though other trees are late; and every breath was perfume.

'But she was too weary to look at it; and before we had gone two miles, it seemed to me that I could think of nothing but the hateful length of the drive, and the ups and downs of the road.

'When we arrived, she would walk into the cottage, and before nurse or I realised what she was doing, she went straight through the little passage which runs from front to back, out into the garden. She stood a moment—in her shawls, with the little white hood she has devised for herself drawn close round her head and face—looking at the river with its rocks and foaming water, at the shoulder of Nab Scar above the trees, at the stone house with the red blinds opposite.

'"It looks just the same," she said, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

'We brought her in—nurse and I—and when she had been put comfortably on the low couch I had sent from London beforehand, and had taken some food, she was a little cheered. She made us draw her to the window of the little back sitting-room, and she lay looking out till it was almost dark. But as I foresaw, the pain of coming is more than equal to any pleasure there may be.

'Yet she would come. During those last days in London, when she would hardly speak to us, when she lay in the dark in that awful room all day, and every attempt to feed her or comfort her made her angry, I could not, for a long time, get her to say what she wished about moving, except that she would not go back to Manchester.

'Her hand-glass could not be kept from her, and one morning she cried bitterly when she saw that she could no longer so arrange her laces as to completely hide the disfigurement of the right side of the face.

'"No! I will *never* go back to Merton Road!" she cried, throwing down the glass; "no one shall see me!"

'But at night, after I hoped she was asleep, she sent nurse to say that she wanted to go to—*Rydal!*—to the same cottage by the Rotha we had stayed at on our honeymoon. Nurse said she could—she could have an invalid-carriage from door to door. Would I write for the rooms at once? And Sandy could join us there.

'So, after nine years, we are here again. The house is empty. We have our old rooms. Nothing is changed in the valley. After she was asleep, I went out along the river, keeping to a tiny path on the steep right bank till I reached a wooden bridge, and then through a green bit, fragrant with fast-springing grass and flowers, to that point beside the lake I remember so well. I left her there one day, sitting, and dabbling in the water, while I ran up Loughrigg. She was nineteen. How she tripped over the hills!

'To-night there was a faint moon. The air was cold, but quite still, and the reflections, both of the islands and of Nab Scar, seemed to sink into unfathomed depths of shadowy water. Loughrigg rose boldly to my left against the night sky; I could see the rifle-butts and the soft blackness of the great larch-plantation on the side of Silver How.

'There, to my right, was the tower of the little church, whitish against the woods, and close beside it, amid the trees, I felt the presence of Wordsworth's house, though I could not see it.

'O poet! who wrote for me, not knowing—oh, heavenly valley!—you have but one voice; it haunts my ears:—

> *'Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,*
> *The bowers where Lucy played;*
> *And thine, too, is the last green field*
> *That Lucy's eyes surveyed.'*

'*May* 10*th*.—She never speaks of dying, and I dare not speak of it. But sometimes she is like a soul wandering in terror through a place of phantoms. Her eyes grow large and strained, she pushes me away from her. And she often wakes at night, sinking in black gulfs of fear, from which I cannot save her.

'Oh, my God! my heart is torn, my life is sickened with pity! Give me some power to comfort—take from me this impotence, this numbness. She, so little practised in suffering, so much of a child still, called to bear this *monstrous* thing. Savage, incredible Nature! But behind Nature there is God—

'To-night she asked me to pray with her—asked it with reproach. "You never say good things to me now!" And I could not explain myself.

'It was in this way. When Dora was with her, she used to read and pray with her. I would not have interfered for the world. When Dora left, I thought she would use the little manual of prayers for the sick that Dora had left behind; the nurse, who is a religious woman, and reads to her a good deal, would have read this whenever she wished. One night I offered to read it to her myself, but she would not let me. And for the rest—in spite of our last talk—I was so afraid of jarring her, of weakening any thought that might have sustained her.

'But to-night she asked me, and for the first time since our earliest married life I took her hand and prayed. Afterwards she lay still, till suddenly her lip began to quiver.

'"I wasn't ever so very bad. I did love you and Sandy, and I did help that girl,—you know—that Dora knew, who went wrong. And I am so ill—*so* ill!"'

'*May* 20*th*.—A fortnight has passed. Sandy and his nurse are lodging at a house on the hill; every morning he comes down here, and I take him for a walk. He was very puzzled and grave at first when he saw her, but now he has grown used to her look, and he plays merrily about among the moss-grown rocks beside the river, while she lies in the slung couch, to which nurse and I carry her on a little stretcher, watching him.

'There was a bright hour this morning. We are in the midst of a spell of dry and beautiful weather, such as often visits this rainy country in the early summer, before any visitors come. The rhododendrons and azaleas are coming out in the gardens under Loughrigg—some little copses here and there are sheets of blue—and the green is rushing over the valley. We had put her among the rocks under a sycamore-tree—a singularly beautiful tree, with two straight stems dividing its rounded masses of young leaf. There were two wagtails perching on the stones in the river, and swinging their long tails; and the light flickered through the trees on to the water foaming round the stones or slipping in brown cool sheets between them. There was a hawthorn-tree in bloom near by; in the garden of the house opposite a woman was hanging out some clothes to dry; the Grasmere coach passed with a clatter, and Sandy with the two children from the lodgings ran out to the bridge to look at it.

'Yes, she had a moment of enjoyment! I bind the thought of it to my heart. Lizzie was sitting sewing near the edge of the river, that she might look after Sandy. He was told not to climb on to the stones in the current of the stream, but as he was bent on catching the vain, provoking wagtails who strutted about on them, the prohibition was unendurable. As soon as Lizzie's head was bent over her work, he would clamber in and out till he reached some quite forbidden rock; and then, looking back with dancing eyes and the tip of his little tongue showing between his white teeth, he would say, "Go on with your work, Nana, *darling!*"—And his mother's look never left him all the time.

'Once he had been digging with his little spade among the fine grey gravel silted up here and there among the hollows of the rocks. He had been digging with great energy, and for May the air was hot. Lizzie looked up and said to him, "Sandy, it's

time for me to take you to bed"—that is, for his midday sleep. "Yes," he said, with a languid air, sitting down on a stone with his spade between his knees—"yes, I think I'd better come to bed. My heart is very dreary." "What do you mean?" "My heart is very dreary—dreary means tired, you know." "Oh, indeed!—where is your heart?" "Here," he said, laying his hand lackadaisically on the small of his back.

'And then she smiled, for the first time for so many, many days! I came to sit by her; she left her hand in mine; and after the child was gone the morning slipped by peacefully, with only the sound of the river and the wheels of a few passing carts to break the silence.

'In the afternoon she asked me if I should not have to go back to Manchester. How could all those men and those big printing-rooms get on without me? I told her that John reported to me every other day; that a batch of our best men had sent word to me, through him, that everything was going well, and I was not to worry; that there had been a strike of some importance among the Manchester compositors, but that our men had not joined.

'She listened to it all, and then she shut her eyes and said:—

'"I'm glad you did that about the men. I don't understand quite—but I'm glad."

'. . . You can see nothing of her face now in its white draperies but the small, pointed chin and nose; and then the eyes, with their circles of pain, the high centre of the brow, and a wave or two of her pretty hair tangled in the lace edge of the hood.

'"*My darling,—my darling! God have mercy upon us!*"'

'*June 2nd.*—"*For the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment.*" How profoundly must he who spoke the things reported in this passage have conceived of marriage! *For the hardness of your hearts.* Himself governed wholly by the inward voice, unmoved by the mere external authority of the great Mosaic name, he handles the law presented to him with a sort of sad irony. The words imply the presence in him of a slowly formed and passionately held ideal. Neither sin, nor suffering, nor death can nor ought to destroy the marriage bond, once created. It is not there for our pleasure, nor for its mere natural object,—but to form the soul.

'The world has marched since that day, in law—still more, as it supposes, in sentiment. But are we yet able to bear such a saying?

'. . . Then compare with these words the magnificent outburst in which, a little earlier, he sweeps from his path his mother and his brethren. There are plentiful signs—take the "corban" passage, for instance, still more, the details of the Prodigal Son—of the same deep and tender thinking as we find in the most authentic sayings about marriage applied to the

parental and brotherly relation. But he himself, realising, as it would seem, with peculiar poignancy, the sacredness of marriage and the claim of the family, is yet alone, and must be alone to the end. The fabric of the Kingdom rises before him; his soul burns in the fire of his message; and the lost sheep call.

'She has been fairly at ease this afternoon, and I have been lying on the grass by the lake, pondering these things. The narrative of Mark, full as it is already of legendary accretion, brings one so close to him; the living breath and tone are in one's ears.'

'*June 4th.*—These last two days she is much worse. The local trouble is stationary; but there must be developments we know nothing of elsewhere. For she perishes every day before our eyes—we cannot give her sleep—there is such *malaise*, emaciation, weariness.

'She is wonderfully patient. It seems to me, looking back, that a few days ago came a change. I cannot remember any words that marked it, but it is as though—without our knowing it—her eyes had turned themselves irrevocably from us and from life, to the hills of death. Yet—strange!—she takes more notice of those about her. Yesterday she showed an interest just like her old self in the children's going to a little fête at Ambleside. She would have them all in—Sandy and the landlady's two little girls—to look at them when they were dressed. —What strikes me with awe is that she has no more tears, though she says every now and then the most touching things—things that pierce to the very marrow.

'She told me to-day that she wished to see her father. I have written to him this evening.'

'*June 6th.*—Purcell has been here a few hours, and has gone back to-night. She received him with perfect calmness, though they have not spoken to each other for ten years. He came in with his erect, military port and heavy tread, looking little older, though his hair is gray. But he blenched at sight of her.

'"You must kiss me on the forehead," she said to him feebly, "but, please, very gently."

'So he kissed her, and sat down. He cleared his throat often, and did not know what to say. But she asked him, by degrees, about some of her mother's relations whom she had not seen for long, then about himself and his health. The ice thawed, but the talk was difficult. Towards the end he inquired of her—and, I think, with genuine feeling—whether she had "sought salvation." She said faintly, "No;" and he, looking shocked and shaken, bade her, with very much of his old voice and manner, and all the old phraseology, "lay hold of the merits of Jesus."

'Towards the end of his exhortations she interrupted him.

'"You must see Sandy, and you must kiss me again. I

wasn't a good daughter. But, oh! why wouldn't you make friends with me and David? I tried—you remember I tried?"

'"I am ready to forgive all the past," he said, drawing himself up; "I can say no more."

'"Well, kiss me!" she said, in a melancholy whisper. And he kissed her again.

'Then I would not let him exhaust her any more, or take any set farewell. I hurried him away as though for tea, and nurse and I pronounced against his seeing her again.

'On our walk to the coach he broke out once more, and implored me, with much unction and some dignity, not to let my infidel opinions stand in the way, but to summon some godly man to see and talk with her. I said that a neighbouring clergyman had been several times to see her, since, as he probably knew, she had been a Churchwoman for years. In my inward frenzy I seemed to be hurling all sorts of wild sayings at his head; but I don't believe they came to speech, for I know at the end we parted with the civility of strangers. I promised to send him news. What amazed me was his endless curiosity about the details of her illness. He would have the whole history of the operation, and all the medical opinion she could remember from the nurse. And on our walk he renewed the subject; but I could bear it no more.

'Oh, my God! what does it matter to me *why* she is dying?'

'Then, when I got home, I found her rather excited, and she whispered to me: "He asked me if I had sought salvation, and I said No. I didn't seek it, David; but it comes—when you are here." Then her chest heaved, but with that strange instinct of self-preservation she would not say a word more, nor would she let me weep. She asked me to hold her hands in mine, and so she slept a little.

'Dora writes that in a fortnight more she can get a holiday of a week or two. Will she be in time?

'It is two months to-day since we went to London.'

On one of the last days in June Dora arrived. It seemed to her that Lucy could have but a few days to live. Working both outwardly and inwardly, the terrible disease had all but done its work. She had nearly lost the power of swallowing, and lived mainly on the morphia injections which were regularly administered to her. But at intervals she spoke a good deal, and quite clearly.

And Dora had not been six hours with her before a curious thing happened. The relation which, ever since their meeting as girls, had prevailed between her and Lucy, seemed to be suddenly reversed. She was no longer the teacher and sustainer; in the little dying creature there was now a remote and heavenly power; it could not be described, but Dora yielded with tears to the awe and sovereignty of it.

She saw with some plainness, however, that it depended on

the relation between the husband and wife. Since she had been with them last, it had been touched—this relation—by a Divine alchemy. The self in both seemed to have dropped away. The two lives were no longer two, but one—he cherishing, she leaning.

The night she came she pressed Lucy to take the Holy Communion. Lucy assented, and the Communion was administered, with David kneeling beside her pillow. But afterwards Lucy was troubled, and when Dora proposed at night to read and pray with her, she said faintly, 'No; David does." And thenceforward, though she was all gentleness, Dora did not find it very easy to get religious speech with her, and went often—poor Dora!—sadly, and in fear.

Dora had been in the house five days, when new trouble followed on the old. David one morning received a letter from Louie, forwarded from Manchester, and when Dora followed him into the garden with a message, she found him walking about distracted.

'Read it!' he said.

The letter was but a few scrawled lines:—

'Cécile has got diphtheria. Our doctor says so, but he is a devil. I must have another—the best—and there is no money. If she dies, you will never see me again, I swear. I dare say you will think it a good job, but now you know.'

The writing was hardly legible, and the paper had been twisted and crumpled by the haste of the writer.

'What is to be done?' said David, in pale despair. 'Can I leave this house one hour—one minute?'

Then a sudden thought struck him. He looked at Dora with a flash of appeal.

'Dora, you have been our friend always, and you have been good to Louie. Will you go? I need not say all shall be made easy. I could get John to take you over. He has been several times to Paris for me this last five years, and would be a help.'

That was indeed a struggle for Dora! Her heart clung to these people she loved, and the *dévote* in her yearned for those last opportunities with the dying, on the hope of which she still fed herself. To go from this deathbed, to that fierce mother, in those horrible surroundings!

But just as she had taught Louie in the old days because David Grieve asked her, so now she went, in the end, because he asked her.

She was to be away six days at least. But the doctor thought it possible she might return to find Lucy alive. David made every possible arrangement—telegraphed to Louie that she was coming; and to John directing him to meet her at Warrington and take her on; wrote out the times of her journey; the address of a *pension* in the Avenue Friedland, kept by an English lady, to which he happened to be able to direct her; and the name of the English lawyer in Paris who had advised him at the time of Louie's marriage, had done various things for him since, and would, he knew, be a friend in need.

Twelve hours after the arrival of Louie's letter, Dora tore herself from Lucy. 'Don't say good-bye,' said David, his face working, and to spare him and Lucy she went as though she were just going across the road for the night. David saw her—a white and silent traveller—into the car that was to take her on the first stage of a journey which, apart from everything else, alarmed her provincial imagination. David's gratitude threw her into a mist of tears as she drove off. Surely, of all the self-devoted acts of Dora's life, this mission and this leave-taking were not the least!

Lucy heard the wheels roll away. A stony, momentary sense of desolation came over her as this one more strand was cut. But David came in, and the locked lips relaxed. It had been necessary to tell her the reason of Dora's departure. And in the course of the long June evening David gathered from the motion of her face that she wished to speak to him. He bent down to her, and she murmured :—

'Tell Louie I wished I'd been kinder—I pray God will let her keep Cécile. . . . She must come to Manchester again when I'm gone.'

The night-watch was divided between David and the nurse. At five o'clock in the summer morning—brilliant once more after storm and rain—he injected morphia into the poor wasted arm, and she took a few drops of brandy. Then, after a while, she seemed to sleep; and he, stretched on a sofa beside her, and confident of waking at the slightest sound, fell into a light doze.

Lucy woke when the sun was high, rather more than an hour later. Her eyes were teased by a chink in the curtain; she hardly knew what it was, but her dying sense shrank, and she vaguely thought of calling David. But as she lay, propped up, she looked down on him, and she saw his pale, sunken face, with the momentary softening of rest upon it. And there wandered through her mind fragments of his sayings to her in that last evening of theirs together in the Manchester house,—especially, '*It can only be proved by living—by every victory over the evil self.*' In its mortal fatigue her memory soon lost hold of words and ideas; but she had the strength not to wake him.

Then as she lay in what seemed to her this scorching light—in reality it was one little ray which had evaded the thick curtains—a flood of joy seemed to pour into her soul. 'I shall not live beyond to-day,' she thought, 'but I know now I shall see him again.'

When at last she made a faint movement, and he woke at once, he saw that the end was very near. He thought of Dora in Paris with a pang, but there was no help for it. Through that day he never stirred from her side in the darkened room, and she sank fast. She spoke only one connected sentence—to say with great difficulty, 'Dying is long—but—*not*—painful.' The words woke in him a strange echo; they had been among the last words

of 'Lias, his childhood's friend. But she breathed one or two names—the landlady of the lodging-house, and the servants, especially the nurse.

They came in on tiptoe and kissed her. She had already thanked each one.

Sandy was just going to bed, when David carried him in to her. One of her last conscious looks was for him. He was in his nightgown, with bare feet, holding his father tight round the neck, and whimpering. They bent down to her, and he kissed her on the cheek, as David told him, 'very softly.' Then he cried to go away from this still, grey mother. David gave him to the nurse and came back.

The day passed, and the night began. The doctor in his evening visit said it would be a marvel if she saw the morrow. David sat beside the bed, his head bowed on the hand he held; the nurse was in the farther corner. His whole life and hers passed before him; and in his mind there hovered perpetually the image of the potter and the wheel. He and she—the Hand so unfaltering, so divine had bound them there, through resistance and anguish unspeakable. And now, for him there was only a sense of absolute surrender and submission, which in this hour of agony and exaltation rose steadily into the ecstasy—ay, the *vision* of faith! In the pitying love which had absorbed his being he had known that 'best' at last whereat his craving youth had grasped; and losing himself wholly had found his God.

And for her, had not her weak life become one flame of love—a cup of the Holy Grail, beating and pulsing with the Divine Life?

The dawn came. She pulled restlessly at her white wrapper—seemed to be in pain—whispered something of 'a weight.' Then the last change came over her. She opened her eyes—but they saw no longer. Nature ceased to resist, and the soul had long since yielded itself. With a meekness and piteousness of look not to be told, never to be forgotten, Lucy Grieve passed away.

CHAPTER X

THE very day after Lucy had been carried to her last rest in that most poetic of all graveyards which bends its grassy shape to the encircling Rotha and holds in trust the ashes of Wordsworth, David Grieve started for Paris.

He had that morning received a telegram from Dora: 'Louie disappeared. Have no clue. Can you come?' Two days before, the news of Cécile's death from diphtheria had reached him in a letter from poor Dora, rendered almost inarticulate by her grief for Lucy and bitter regret for her own absence from her cousin's deathbed, mingling with her pity for Louie's unfortunate child and her dread and panic with regard to Louie herself.

But so long as that white form lay shrouded in the cottage upper room, he could not move—and he could scarcely feel.