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of death. He knew the face of death as familiarly as he knew his Canadian ranch.

These two were undoubtedly women's men, but they were not philanderers. One could imagine either one of them tossing away ambition and all he possessed for love of the one woman. Such men rise seldom to the fly of womanly charm, but once caught, they are not lightly cast aside.

Hollender studied their faces, glanced at his wife, and brooded. He saw himself and these three people as on a plane infinitely above the innocuous Smith and the Blyths. In his exaltation he felt securely above the level of vulgarity.

"What a test," he thought to himself. "What a test it would be!" and smiled.

Then something his wife did or said, some faint movement of her hand toward the soldier,—some little thing, so quickly passed that the brain could not altogether seize it,—wiped the smile from his face. For a moment he wondered vaguely what was coming over him; then his thoughts took form and direction. What man, after all, is absolutely sure? How many men have been fools to their wives and all the world through a too perfect trust?

"What rot!" he cried to himself, and shrugged his shoulders as though to shake off his mood. But his nerves refused to be steadied so easily. He arose, felt his pockets to see if he had cigarettes and matches, said he was going out for a smoke, and passed into the corridor. He had not gone five steps when the train plunged into the tunnel. Almost without volition he paused, turned, crept back to the compartment, and stooped over his wife.

He remembered just how she had been sitting, with her hat off, and her head thrown back against the partition cushion of the high upholstered seat. He bent over her till he felt her faint breath. He laid his lips gently on hers. For the fraction of a second she recoiled; then, to his horror, her lips came forward and caressed his mouth with a soft, silent kiss.

WITH his brain in a mad whirl, he stole from the compartment and staggered down the corridor. The train shot out of the tunnel into the glare of a rare sunny day; but his eyes were so blurred he could scarcely see. He stumbled along until he found an empty section, temporarily vacated by people gone to dinner at the first call. He sat down and stared before him. Presently he noticed that his hands and knees were trembling.

"You asked for it," he said aloud to himself. "You asked for it."

His own voice sounded strange to his ears. For the first time in his life he felt like two distinct persons. His own self, the self he had always known, stood apart and stared accusingly at the new and shaken being that he had become. He felt as though he were literally in the air,—as though all solid purchase had been swept from beneath his feet.

One thought penetrated the chaos in his brain: "You must go back. You must pull your two selves together and go back. You must go back as though nothing had happened, as though you knew nothing."

Gradually he steadied his muscles. He arose and walked up and down, a cigarette held absently between his fingers. He had forgotten to light it. He puffed on it two or three times before he noticed that it was unlighted, then he struck a match and watched the flame tremble. That would never do. He struck another and another until one burned quite steadily. He lit the cigarette and smoked it rapidly.

When he returned to his own section, he found the two men sitting exactly as he had left them, but his wife had slightly changed her position. She held her hat in her lap loosely, both hands playing with its brim absently. Her eyes were half closed, and there was a tiny tilt to the corners of her mouth, as though it were on the verge of smiling. She was not talking or listening. In her face was a look of withdrawal, as if her thoughts had stopped to linger at some point long passed by her companions.

Hollender sat down opposite his wife, but found he could not bear to look at her. Just as he arose to change his seat her eyes swept up and passed swiftly over his face. Her mouth seemed more than ever on the verge of breaking into a smile. He tried to smile back, but he felt that it was a failure. His lips seemed stretched into a straight line that would not bend. He felt his heart pounding.

"She can look at you and smile," he thought bitterly.

It was the first bitter thought he had ever had of his wife. It helped him—stiffened his backbone and hardened his nerves. But the strange feeling of having suddenly become two persons still clung to him. He thought to himself in dialogue. His old half said to the new, "At any rate, you know where you stand. You asked for it, you got it; now take it and use it." All the rest of the way to London, his new self answered back with mumblings and weak interjections: "Why? Why? My God!"

BUT, in spite of the strengthening bitterness, he felt a great gulp of self-pity as he showed his wife into the charming flat he had taken. She flew from room to room and from low laugh to low laugh, for Hollender had achieved a stroke of genius. The flat contained only bare necessities. In each room was a large sign, "Imagine curtains and portières," or, "Imagine cretonnes."

The Girl felt a lump rise in her throat. How wonderful that a mere man should have guarded her against the inevitable loneliness of a strange environment by reserving to her the master solace of beautifying her new home! Wordless, she turned to him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

He had to make an effort not to answer that caress with a shiver; for to him the Girl was not here—the Girl for whom he had planned and remembered. In her stead had come a strange woman, a wonderful woman, such as a king might covet, but a stranger, a mystery. At kissing her he felt a thrill, new and astounding, as though his lips had tasted of the illicit.

For a moment he was horrified, then the internal dialogue began again, and he argued himself back to a sanity founded on reason and facts. He did not know that reason and facts are but will-o'-the-wisps in the realm of emotion. In spite of them the truth remained: his wife was a strange woman. He felt for her a fresh but feverish desire, and gradually succumbed to it. Where all had been purity, there crept in a taint. He could no longer think of their love as something sanctified, hidden and guarded behind some inner, mutual veil. Day by day the Girl receded, day by day he sank and dragged her to the level of the flesh.

But it was only to Hollender's distorted vision that the Girl was withdrawn. She herself was in the flat. She had been there all the time. She had felt a great surge of tenderness as she passed swiftly from one evidence to another of his thoughtfulness, and had turned to him with her heart in her hands and on her lips. The next moment she had come up against him as a barrier. She had found herself suddenly torn one way by his burning eyes, and another by his unsmiling face.

Had he been cold, they would soon have come to open battle and a decision. But as the slow weeks passed, the new fire in him, the unadorned exultation in mere material possession, put her off. She surrendered to his hot caresses breathlessly, only to wonder the more at his long periods of abstraction and gloom. She began to feel herself under a strain, as though her forces were being consumed without recuperation. Life took on a strange face. It became a battle against unseen things. She felt her vitality ebbing, sinking steadily, like a barometer before a storm.

She had plenty of time to puzzle over the change that had taken place in Hollender and in their relations, for he was less with her now than at any other period of their marriage. At first he laid it to his work and its uneven demands on his time, but as the days passed, he omitted

subterfuges. She could feel him twitching in her presence as though under an irksome restraint, and when he would suddenly rise and prepare to go out, she was too hurt even to raise her eyes in question.

If his wife was under a strain, Hollender was doubly so. He had to fight not only against circumstances, but against himself. He was constantly haling himself before a tribunal, trying himself over and over again, and finding no acquittal; only a relief in bitterness at the memory of the overwhelming discovery he made on the train. The Girl was gone forever; there remained this woman whom he could never trust.

More than once he left his work hurriedly to dash to the flat on some flimsy pretext, but really only to find out what his wife was doing. On each of these occasions he started out possessed by mad speculations; on each he returned feeling demeaned, assured by his tardy sanity that he had lowered himself, was constantly lowering himself. Life became a vile thing, dragging him and all that he touched down to an unaccustomed level. He hated himself when he was away from his wife, he despised himself on those occasions when he smothered memory in a cloak of hot affection.

FOUR weeks, each burdened with the strain of a normal year, dragged slowly by; then, one evening when Hollender arose and started toward the door, his wife stopped him.

"You're not going out to-night," she said. "I want to talk to you."

He turned and stared at her. Her voice had sounded like an echo from former days. For a moment he saw her with the eyes that had known only the Girl. He felt a shock. If this were indeed the Girl, her arms had gone strangely thin. Under her eyes there were shadows and pale cheeks, and a mouth drawn down at the corners. In her eyes themselves was a faded light, as of lilacs wilted in too hot a sun. He stared at her lips and remembered.

"Well?" he asked, flushing under the recollection.

"I want you to sit down and listen to me," said the Girl, leaning forward, her arms outstretched on the table before her. "I don't know what's the matter. You haven't cared to tell me. I only know that there is a great deal the matter; so much that it is not only separating us—it's doing more. It's breaking us. Something has changed you terribly. I don't know what it is, but I have thought and thought, and I know when it began, the very moment."

"When?" asked Hollender hoarsely.

The Girl's eyes wandered from his face.

"It began at my last happy moment—the moment in the train when we were in the tunnel and you slipped back and kissed me in the dark."

"What!" whispered Hollender. He rose slowly to his feet and gripped the edge of the table with both hands. His head swam, and when he tried desperately to stare at the Girl he found that his eyes were blinded by a haze. There was a humming in his ears. Perhaps he had not heard her aright. Gradually, word by word, he made her repeat what she had said; then, scarcely knowing what he did,

he caught up his hat and rushed from the room.

He found himself in the open. There was a chill in the air, but he did not notice it. He walked at a terrific pace through the darkened streets. He walked for hours, faster and faster, as though by mere physical haste he were striving to catch up with some aching heart's desire that dodged before him, threatening at any moment to disappear forever and leave behind an eternal void.

What had he done? Oh, what had he lost? As a man gazing across a bleak chasm at a pleasant land he stared back through long ages to the life of peace and trust and communion that had once been his.

"How monstrous," cried his fevered mind, "that so great a happiness should be so fragile!" and something within him answered, "Happiness endures only within guarded shrines."

Twice some fellow pedestrian snatched him back from precipitating himself before a shadowy bus. Finally a constable peered questioningly into his face, stopped him and asked him if he knew where he was going.

At the moment the question seemed almost natural to Hollender. He answered that of course he knew where he was going, and mentioned his own address. The officer hailed a passing taxi; thrust him into it, slammed the door, and gave the driver directions. Five minutes later the cab drew up at the familiar door. Hollender realized that he had been walking in a circle, as though some loadstone had held him to its orbit.

He paid the fare automatically, and, avoiding the elevator, climbed slowly to his own floor, opened the door, and walked in.

The Girl was sitting where he had left her, only her head was fallen forward between her outstretched arms. He coughed and shuffled his feet. She looked up, startled.

A THOUSAND things had been on his tongue to say—great things, strong things, born of vast grief and shame and utter surrender; but his lips, driven by subconscious curiosity, opened to a puerile question.



"Forgive me—only forgive me! You mustn't think I haven't paid—torture—darkness and a lonely road!"