

# THE KISS OF GOLD.

BY KATIE JORDAN.

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[Continued from last Wednesday.]

## CHAPTER VIII.

Delatole's apartments were in the University building. He loved the weather stained pile because it was old—so little was old in New York. He loved the gloomy halls and the high, dusty windows. His rooms were a medley where discord in the extreme blended into a startling harmony. Curiosity shops had been ransacked for treasures, and he had even paid flying visits to ship chandlers' shops upon the wharves in the desire to collect antagonistic bits. Fish nets that had the salt of the sea woven into their fibers took the place of more conventional hangings. Mugs of every size and the most fanciful shapes, some of them very old, hung in a line around the mantle, each a mirror for the crackling fire below. Divans swathed in Turkish stuffs jutted from shadowy angles and held palpitating gleams from hanging lamps in their oriental, bespangled folds. His bed had curtains of pale tapestry fragrant as spice and looped up by spears. It was screened by a leathery Indian mat resembling the back of a huge turtle and suspended by hooks from the ceiling.

Delatole had many sides to his character. He was a rake, a parasite, but he was also a genuine artist and loved his work. He loved the somber dreams which stole in upon his solitude in this old house, in this old street. They tipped his pen with cabalistic power. When the wind howled and the snow fell, the draft passages seemed trodden by dusty feet, and fancy often crossed his threshold, garbed in some fluttering rag of the dead years. Sometimes he had but to half shut his eyes, and looking across his untidy desk to the limits of the spacious square beyond see the roof tops stretch away into a sun-kissed desert, and the hanging smoke become the white tents of a waiting army.

Yes, he loved the place, but it must go and his life there be remembered as a dream. On this November afternoon while he waited for Tom he held in his hand, which was trembling with rage, a notice to leave these self same apartments or pay a very large sum in a very short time. Curious that a man should prefer as a tenant some commonplace fellow with money instead of a brilliant critic who made cigarette lighters of his dunning letters! A few oaths that reduced creation to chaos, and a few puffs of a cigarette cleared his brain. He sat back to think.

So much money had gone at the gambling table; so much on the races; so much in speculation. And the result? Enormous bills flowing in from every quarter, chief among them an appalling array of figures for more than a year's rent.

"There's not a hole or corner where I can borrow a third of it," he exclaimed impatiently, and tightening the girdle of the eastern robe infolding his slight figure he strolled to the window, and through the tangle of bare branches looked across at the snowy grass plots of Washington square.

He scarcely moved for many minutes. Was there nothing he could do? Nothing? One plan after another was dismissed as impracticable until his eyes fell upon Tom coming across the park, the orange light streaming from the west behind him, making a moving silhouette of his vigorous figure.

Delatole's eyes became inscrutable, the smoke wreaths curled furiously around his head, and he caressed his lip with the point of his tongue, as if he had literally tasted a palatable thought.

"You fool! Why didn't you think of him before?" he said aloud and burst out laughing.

When the sedate English valet, who had almost forgotten the look of American money, opened the door for Tom, his host strolled from the window with hands outstretched.

"Only half an hour later," he said airily in his drawing voice. "Not bad for a new celebrity. Did you see The Challenge this morning? Good—wasn't it? Here, read this."

He picked up some loosely scattered pages covered with his delicate, cramped writing and pushed them into Tom's hands.

"This will be in on Thursday morning. You see, it's a minute review of the play. You certainly can't complain."

Tom carried them to the window and turned one rustling page after another. Glorious words were these—magnetic, intense. And how true!—how marvelously true! His own intimate struggles in writing the play had been divined by the keen critical understanding of the writer. The lines flowed delicately, subtly, and were sweet as incense. They throbbed in his brain; his eyes lightened.

"I had not hoped for this," he said, with a grateful glance as he came back to the table while slowly drawing off his gloves. "How awfully kind of you! My conviction that you mean it all is far dearer than that New York will read these words."

"Yes, I mean it all." Delatole handed him a cigarette, gave an abrupt glance at his harassed, weary face, and said musingly—

"You don't look like yourself today. Aren't you well?"

"I'm quite well."

"But you seem depressed."

Tom smoked for a moment in silence. "Not so much depressed. I am disgusted," he said fiercely. "Did you know that I was—drunk last night?"

Delatole opened his eyes very wide and softly laughed as if infinitely amused.

"I wish you wouldn't laugh," Tom said, a little sullenly, a streak of color crossing his cheek. "It was the first time and is not pleasant to remember."

Delatole's eyebrows twitched; he lowered his eyes and thoughtfully moved some trifle on the table.

"But, I say, are you going in for respectability—for that cumbersome respectability that 'strains at a gnat'? Are you?"

The languid curiosity of his tone was more contemptuous than his laugh.

Tom was troubled by a strange feeling as he listened. He did not like Delatole in his usual genial, unreserved way. Just to watch the slow movements of his listless hands held an enigmatical fascination. He felt a strong desire to emulate his ease and sagacity, but underneath and through it all there floated an ill defined repulsion.

The man seemed the product of a forced, perverted life. Something about his dark pallor and sneering lips dimly reminded Tom of a flower forced into a semblance of bloom by the aid of a noxious gas, but with life and color and strength missing.

"You see, my dear fellow," Delatole continued, "I know that you are fresh from a religious environment—that you are young; therefore I don't accept your views seriously. Perhaps they are but natural. I won't label you 'prig' and give you up. I'll only give you time. Here comes my man with some brandy and soda. Perhaps your saintship won't have any?"

"Of course I will. You don't suppose I meant to draw such fine distinctions. Surely you understand," said Tom earnestly, and he looked away into the leaping golden heart of the fire. "Last night's events gave a blow to my preconceived ideas of life. I mean to hold to them, you see."

"Rubbish! A little laxity only makes a man's nature wholesomely expand. Now, look here, Murray," and Delatole spoke impressively as he stroked his pointed beard, "I'm going to transplant you, and to a soil where you'll grow mentally. If you don't astound us with a play even more forgettable than 'The World's Way,' because more mature, it won't be my fault."

A question darkened Tom's eyes, and he leaned eagerly forward.

"You made a wonderfully good guess at life's flavor in 'The World's Way.' But I'm going to make you taste it in truth, the brackish and the sweet. In short, I'm going to ask you to pitch in your fortunes with mine and share these rooms with me. Since Glendenning disappointed me I have preferred to live and dream alone. But—frankly—I like you. The suite is large. We would not clash. Besides, just across the hall is an atelier left vacant since De Courcy ran away only recently to escape his debts. You'll probably find the drapery of a departed model still upon the platform. You could furnish it as you please and have it as your own particular den."

He watched Tom's eyes travel half wistfully around the odd, artistic place.

"Charming," he said at length and added slowly, "but impossible. You see, I'm going to marry very soon."

Delatole stared at him as if incapable of grasping the statement.

"Yes," said Tom, and now a blunt tenderness rang in his voice, "I am going to marry Virginia Kent."

"Are you mad?" and the words were a slow exclamation.

Delatole rose as he spoke, lifted one of the fragile glasses on the table and contemptuously flung it from him. It lay upon the hearth, a mass of opaline splinters.

"In another year you will be as artistically ruined as that glass."

Not dreaming of the selfish motive prompting this violent objection and listening to words that were a passionless prophecy, Tom could not resist the shudder that ominously passed over him.

"One would think I talked of committing a crime." And the words were breathless.

"And so you are. Isn't it a crime to throw away your chance? Life doesn't offer too many of them. Let me tell you, too, my dear fellow, that you do not strike me as one who would cultivate the virtues of patience and humility under the stress of failure and poverty. Marry now, when you have just crossed the line, before your strength has had a fair test, and you'll not only fail, but probably break your wife's heart in a year. You remember what I said to you last night. I did not dream then that you were thinking of the madness of an early marriage; that you stood on the verge of the abyss strewn with the ruins of good beginnings."

As Tom listened his face grew stern, his eyes searching.

"Why should I fail because I keep my word to a woman, better, truer, a hundred times, than I am—not a woman to retard any man's progress? She has been my inspiration. You don't know Virginia. She is more to me than anything in the world. I need not fail. I will not fail."

He looked very stalwart, very determined, as he towered above Delatole, his blue eyes flashing in his intense face.

"What interest can I have but for your good?" asked his new friend, and the silken voice held a soothing gentleness after Tom's hot, strained tones. "Let us look at this matter dispassionately. You are young. You have written one play of startling strength and charm. It will bring you so much money. Alone, independent, you would have a good income, be able to mix with the world, travel a little and feed your brain until it teemed with digested impressions gathered from bouidoir and barroom. The same money will not support a home and a wife except in a cramped, obscure way. Your love for her will be another drawback to earnest work. The treadmill of your dull, loving, respectable existence day in and day out in some little flat will afford no feverish impetus to your imagination. You will never write a play worth having typewritten on the inspiration offered by a baby's fists. Ah, have I not watched the mental paralysis set in before? Love is bad enough, but love and poverty!"

Tom turned away and faced the window. He did not seek the park. For just one moment the gray picture Delatole stretched rose before him, and an acute,

unmeasured despair took hold of him.

He beat it back fiercely. He would not believe. But the resistance was no longer buoyant; it was forced.

"Then there is the other side—freedom knowing no limit," continued Delatole in a soliloquy tone as he walked up and down smoking, never once glancing at the silent, erect figure in the window. "Freedom. Only those who have surrendered it know the full sweetness of that word. Every door would be open to you. You need not only be a Bohemian. A fellow like you, of undoubted talent, well looking, clever, independent and with some money would not have to knock at society's golden door for admission. It would fly open to you. For myself I hate the stiff set, but it is always well for an artist to become acquainted with every sort of human. Under conditions of this sort your artistic vein would warm and expand, your nature vibrate to change after change. The man who enters a race fettered is a fool. When I have said this, I have said all."

There was silence after these words and then the rustling of paper. Tom hastily turned and saw Delatole leaning against the table, looking scornfully over each of the pages whereon the criticism was written that had so delighted him. A painful premonition made him cold, but he said nothing.

"Ah, well, I wish I had known that you contemplated this idiosyncrasy before I wasted time and ink on you, Murray. You didn't tell me, of course. No reason why you should. But I assure you, had I guessed what manner of man you were I wouldn't have plunged into such a bewildering prophecy about your future greatness. I'm not usually so impulsive," and he rent the sheets half across before Tom's voice made him pause.

"Is this fair? If you really liked 'The World's Way,' why won't you say so?" The mysterious violet gray of twilight stealing through the high windows behind him touched his young face with shadows. It was pinched, eager, watchful.

"Oh, I'll do that, of course. A few lines, a paragraph, will suffice, but not this psalm of victory, this heralding of a new voice that is not to be stilled, but will rise again and again—not that. You'll have to prove all I've said false before I write of you in that strain." And he was the incarnation of bland, impersonal regret as the papers once more fluttered in his hands.

He looked them over half regretfully. "It's one of the best things I've ever written, but in submission to my honest opinion I must destroy it."

In a few strides Tom was beside him. They looked intently at each other. Tom's eyes wavered and fell.

"Don't—don't," he said, and his voice was half choked. "Give me time. Let me think."

Half an hour later they were walking up University place. They dined at a chophouse frequented by Bohemia, where tables were bare and beer was served in mugs.

"Better than Delmonico's in certain moods," said Delatole as they crossed the sanded floor; "the food is excellent and cooked to suit Lucullus. As accompaniments you have art, devil-may-careism, smoke and even socialism."

His friends were scattered through the long room, and merry greetings were called out to him, which he repaid in kind. The hours passed in sparkling reminiscences, jests and laughter. Delatole's levity became acrobatic, and in this impudent wag, who soon formed a group around himself, there was not a trace of the cynic, the philosopher, the serious man of letters. Much that he said was coarse, but so audaciously humorous it was impossible not to respond.

Tom found himself moved to enthusiasm and laughter. His pulses were alive; his eyes glistened. Yes, let him reason as he would, he was attuned to this reckless brilliancy, this mingling of wits, this chatter of defiant freedom and spontaneity. Delatole was right. Chance words here and there gave him a new insight into a happy, modern paganism that filled his brain with imagery. The witchery, the sweep of it were intoxicating.

He regretted when 9 o'clock came and Delatole parted with him to keep an appointment at his club. No word had been exchanged between the two men upon the subject that so nearly concerned them both. Now, as Tom hurried up town the undecided question danced before his eyes, his heart became suddenly weighted.

Should he cast the old life behind him utterly and enter upon a new one—free?

He reached Union square. It sparkled in crystal whiteness. The branches patterned on the pavements waved fantastically about his feet as he strode on, his head down. Passionate indecision went with him like a wraith in the white rays. He thought of his enchanted dreaming of the night before. Only last night! Ah, he had learned much since then. Had he ever really reasoned or understood before?

"Keep yourself unshackled. The man who enters a race fettered is a fool."

The frosty breeze that whistled past his ears seemed whispering these words to him.

His memory flew back to a miserable childhood spent among the rigors of a poor western farm, and he shuddered. Only by a hard fight and incredible sacrifice had his father saved the money necessary for his support and education.

Poverty! How he loathed and feared it! How he had always loathed it! Ingrained in his nature was a love for the poetry of life, a hatred of the commonplace, and now—let him be careful, lest by one ill advised step he taste all the old bitterness again.

The fragrance of the hyacinths in his coat came to him in the crisp air, so penetratingly sweet it gave him a heart-ache—the flowers she had given him.

With a groan he flung himself into a seat.

"I love her! I love her! And she? Have I not had the confession in her eyes—in her kiss? Who has helped me—who has understood me like her? How can I pain her—how can I leave her?"

For himself, if the reckless ambition mastering him required it, he could put

love away, blot it from his life, and the thought had some of the ecstasy of martyrdom. But Virginia loved him, and he knew it. The thought of hurting her was cruel, and in the agonized tumult of the moment cold drops stood on his brow. Again as in the morning came the inward avowal of his own weakness. Oh, what if Delatole had spoken truly, and the sovereignty of love meant the enslaving of the talent he had sworn should make him famous! Then—oh, then, to what depths his ruined hopes would fling him! And he would drag her with him in his fall, perhaps making her taste a bitter anguish to which this younger disappointment was but little. And the other side of the picture—the life of the artist purely, the untrammelled, easy, earnest life, where great things would be accomplished—was it not better?

Hours passed in this mute conflict. Love with dove's eyes first pealed, then changed to a fury and scourged him. Doubt, fear of himself, insatiable ambition, passed in mocking line and with shadowy lips whispered predictions that terrified him.

When he rose from the seat, he was benumbed. The frost seemed to have made a casing for his heart. The midnight traffic of the town, like the throbbing of massive machinery, swept across the white silence of the square imperatively rousing him to a sense of action. Yes, there lay his world, his life. No more dreaming. He had dreamed long enough. The conflict was finished. Love had received its death wound.

## CHAPTER IX.

Day by day the breach widened between the life Tom had led and the one newly opening before him. The atelier had been transformed into an eastern nest, fragrant, harmonious. He had given Delatole the money that paid the bills, had also advanced half a year's rent for the suite and stood hopelessly committed to the agreement.

The hours spent in Chelsea square were like the rigor of an unsought penance, but the days drifted on while his new home awaited him, and still he could not find the courage to cut the old ties. He was in continual antagonism to his better nature. His honest instincts asserted themselves only to be stifled, for his decision had been taken, his steps set upon a road that allowed no turning back.

So a fortnight dragged by, bringing Christmas snow and greens to the town. Chelsea square was a patch of crystal brightness, the snow undisturbed in the seminary grounds. The bells in the chapel pealed gladly morning, noon and night.

But the benedictory chimes were like mockery to Virginia. These days, when every window and shop gave evidence of Christmas cheer, were black and cold to her. Tom was changed. He avoided her eyes. When left for a moment alone with her, he relapsed into a constrained silence. His life became daily more irregular, his moods more uncertain. The simplicity that matched his blue eyes was slowly vanishing before new, insincere mannerisms.

When Virginia remembered the kiss that had opened paradise to her, shame burned her, and her pain changed to fierce self contempt. It was the fruit of a moment's passing impulse with him, and it had meant everything to her. He had forgotten or set aside the unfinished sentence that had shot like a rainbow across her life. He had forgotten, and she had remembered. She had lugged these things to her heart as memories precious beyond words, a half spoken promise of a love that matched her own.

Furious pain, wounded, aching pride, sometimes made the defiant little head droop wearily and a passion of wild sobs leave her lips in a stifled cry. But only when she was alone. Let him come and go as he pleased, let him hurt her by this other side of his nature daily revealing itself more fully, but he must not guess she had dreamed of that which might never be hers.

But, oh, to see him, speak to him, and never by a single glance mirror the mutiny that kept singing one question in her brain—"Why—why—why has he changed?"—this was pain of that cruel and particular kind that dwarfs in its penetrating torture the endurance required for larger griefs.

And worse to bear than all was her father's assumption of a secret understanding existing between them.

"I say, now, you and young Murray are not quite so indifferent to each other as you'd have me believe, are you?" he asked her one morning as he lingered over his paper and cup of chocolate.

"Tom will always be my friend, I hope," Virginia answered steadily, but almost inaudibly.

Mr. Kent gave a sharp side glance at her pale face and a shrug.

"You don't mean to say there's nothing else? Stuff and nonsense! He is in love with you, whatever he may be now. Just before that play of his was put on, when he was on the tenter hooks of anxiety, I saw him watching you many a time. The tender passion reveals itself now just as it did when I suffered from it, and Tom looked sheepish. I dare say I used to look so. I know my rivals always appeared so to me. Has anything changed him?"

No word came from Virginia's quivering lips. No word could come.

"Then you are not secretly betrothed to him?"

She went hurriedly to her father's side, and holding his arm tightly looked at him with dry, burning eyes.

"You must not fancy such a thing. I am nothing to him. Oh, you wouldn't speak to him about this, father! You wouldn't! No; it would kill me if you did!"

"Speak to him? P? What are you talking about? Am I likely to do so? Do I strike you as that sort of person? The man who wants to marry my daughter must sue for that honor."

He studied her face hard for a moment, and his lips settled into a thin, straight line. The tragedy in her dilated eyes told him the truth, and a haughty anger against Tom awoke within him. Virginia's love won and thrown away

seemed an insignificant thing beside the thought that any man should indulge in desultory lovelaking with his daughter and then repent of it. His daughter! There lay the sting that was unbearable.

It was after 8 o'clock that night before Tom entered the house. Delatole and he were to leave for a visit to the south in the morning. He could no longer postpone his going. But how to tell them? How to say goodbye? Would Virginia remain his friend? Would she understand? Oh, she must, she must. He could not bear to think she would hate or despise him.

As he walked slowly up stairs he met Mr. Kent coming down. The old man's greeting was chilling, but courteous. Tom drew his breath hard and plunged into explanations at once. The words were feverish, rapid—polite regrets for his necessary departure, mingled with a recital of his future plans.

Mr. Kent heard him unmoved to the end.

"I don't wish to bandy any words with you, Mr. Murray," he said in a calm, colorless tone. "One thing I must say however. When I was young, people did not repay hospitality as you have done. Pardon me, if you please. Don't interrupt. Without plunging into stupid detail I am sure you understand me. I will say goodbye to you now. You cannot go too quickly to please me. I dare say you will succeed. The sensitive and forbearing man is often left in the background, but men of your stamp, never."

He passed down the hall, leaving Tom hot and indignant. Had Virginia told him, or did he only guess? It was impossible to retaliate, impossible to tell this selfish dreamer he had never been his guest. Besides the words did rankle, oh, so deeply! For, though uttered from a partially mistaken sense of wrong, they were true. He had acted a cowardly part.

His face was worn and reckless as he turned to the hall window, endeavoring to conquer the quivering of his pulses before facing Virginia.

It had commenced to snow again. He could hear the students practicing a new Christmas hymn in the chapel opposite. In a moment the years spent in the college, so different from his present life, passed in a series of pictures before him, and with them the thought of all he owed Virginia. But for her "The World's Way" would never have been written. Looking back, he saw how clearly her companionship had nerved him to continual effort. Hers was the voice that had urged him on, hers the dauntless optimism that had sent a rift of glory into his darkest days.

An ache rose in his throat; the snow, in the light from the open chapel door, whirled mistily before him. Now that he was actually going the thought that he was leaving her was exquisite pain. The familiar landmarks frowned an unbearable reproach.

"What a fool I am!" he thought and gave his shoulders an impatient shrug. "When I'm with Delatole, I see I've done right. When I'm here—pslaw! what's the use of these regrets? They lead nowhere. I can't turn back. I must go on. I'll never forget Virginia, we can be friends still, and some day, in a year maybe, when I'm sure of myself, if she but loves me, all will somehow come right."

He went first to his own room and sat down, looking before him in a dazed way. Would it all come right? Did he believe that? Was he trying to deceive himself at the last? Then for the sake of action and to keep thought away, as much as possible he put his clothes and books in his trunk, locked and addressed it. Even when that was done he hesitated. A tumult seemed striving to tear his heart asunder. His hands were like ice.

"I must go to her. I must. Why delay longer?" He found her leaning against the melodeon, her fingers buried in the fur of the little white kitten he had often teased. Her face was perfectly colorless. She looked at him steadfastly, coldly and uttered no word. It was evident she had heard his voice in the hall and was waiting for him.

There was a long and painful silence. The words that came thronging to Tom's lips were those he dared not speak.

"You have come to say goodbye," Virginia said abruptly, still bending upon his face that full, disconcerting gaze. "I heard all you said to father. There is no need to go over it again."

She held out her hand, and he seized it eagerly, only to find it cold and unresponsive. Oh, if she but uttered one pleading word, one reproach, that he might in some measure defend himself! But this chilling repose was a wall which shut him away from her.

"Do not misjudge me," he burst out passionately, his voice broken, and at the words she looked away. "I am going away for a time to work hard, very hard. And I want to believe that your good wishes go with me, that you still remain my friend."

No reply, but her eyes were upon him again, as eloquent with reproach as the eyes of the murdered Caesar gazing on the face of Brutus.

That look told all. He felt it in his inmost heart. He knew himself contemptible. But Delatole's worldly wise, humorously cynical counsel was with him, impressive and significant as the tenets of a new creed to a convert.

He dropped her cold hand in silence and half turned away.

"I'll come and see you very often, Virginia, if I may," he said haltingly. "New York is not a wilderness, you know. Whenever my work permits, I'll come and have a chat with you, just—just the same."

The words died on his lips. He knew he lied. He knew it would be long ere he should choose to see her changed face, if indeed ever again.

Her silence maddened him.

"Have you nothing to say, Virginia?" "Goodby," she said, and smiled—but such a smile! There were agony and scorn in it.

"Is that all?"

She held up her little head proudly, and again from her pale, tense lips came a murmur clear and defiant:

"Goodby."

Then her eyes closed. When she looked up, he was gone.

Her body seemed weighted, and she moved with an effort to the window, finding a dreaminess that soothed the hurt in her heart in watching the even fall of snow.

The chapel yonder was ablaze with light, rainbow coloring from the windows falling in bars upon the fresh snow that lovingly outlined every twig and angle. And now the students came thronging out, still singing the chorus of the Christmas hymn, passed from her sight, and silence fell again.

A light touch on her arm made her turn, and she saw her father. There was an angry light in his eyes, although he smiled.

"So our young gentleman has gone?"

"Yes."

"M-m," and he pursed up his lips reflectively as he swayed lightly to and fro, his hands behind his back. "Just so. It's the way of the world. I know it. I have seen my friends depart one by one. Only the few staunch ones have remembered and remained. But there is one consolation. We haven't lost much. Our young friend was a fair specimen of the genus cad."

Virginia winced at the word and shielded her face with her hand.

"We don't want him. I've learned to snap my fingers at the pleasures that won't stay and make the most of those that will. We'll snap our fingers, Virginia. He's gone away like a puppy with a bone he wants to eat alone. Let him go."

But still Virginia looked out at the snow and felt each of the city's muffled sounds like the surge from a sea on which her dearest had embarked, leaving her alone.

"We'll not miss him, Virginia," pursued her father in the meditative voice that maddened her to a dumb fury in that moment. She opened and closed her hands and set her lips hard. "I say we'll shed no tears for him. We'll forswear all sentimental dreams if we had any. We'll remember that his leaving the church for the stage was viewed in this latter light, but an evidence of the rowdiness inherent in our young friend. Very, very rowdy. We will console ourselves by remembering how much we are above him and that we couldn't have expected more from a man whose father was a brown fisted Irish immigrant, his mother an ignorant girl of the plains."

He lit a cigar with a nice deliberateness and put on his cape and hat.

"I'm going for a walk in the snow now. This room depresses me. Stir the fire and turn up the light. When I come back, I'll have you play something by Mozart."

He turned her lightly to him and kissed her on the brow. If her flesh had been touched by marble lips, the caress could not have chilled or sickened her more. She could not cling to her father and sob out her pain. He had always quietly transferred his griefs to her. How could she expect him to help her now?

But when he was gone the loneliness became unbearable. His voice could at least keep the shadows from closing around her like a tomb. Her heavy glance took in each familiar thing. The girl with the mask laughed at her from the corner. The keys of the organ flashed back an eerie intelligence.

"Never again," they seemed to say. "Never again."

A trembling seized her. She fell face downward on a couch and threw her arms out wide. How cruel it was, this stinging of human love flung back to feed in bitterness upon itself! Oh, was there nothing more in life than this? Was this all? How had she failed? What had she forgotten or passed by that might have held him?

For, say what we will, a woman's heart does not beat only for the strong and true. Weak men and bad ones have without effort controlled a love the angels might have coveted. There is sometimes sufficient fascination in a trick of manner, just the fall in a voice, to outweigh in love's inconsequent balance all the Christian virtues.