

BEAUTY'S HOUR

CHAPTER V



HERE was confusion in the Harman's house the next day. I did no work, but sat idly with the girls in their sitting-room, while they talked over the ball. They were full of the new beauty, Miss Hatherley.

"And such an odd thing, Mary. Gerald says she reminds him of you."

"Quite impossible," said I. "But I thank him."

"Something in her voice and way of talking," Betty went on. "You *have* a nice voice, you know. Gerald says she is very original; and goodness knows he had opportunity enough of finding out; he danced with no one else."

I nearly contradicted that statement, but saved myself in time.

"I'm so sorry I couldn't go," I said instead. "Did Miss Sturgis enjoy herself?"

"And are you really better?" said Betty. "You didn't seem ill in the afternoon. As for Bella——"

"Oh, Bella!" interrupted Clara. "Bella had best look to her laurels. No one noticed her while Miss Hatherley was in the room."

I went on with my questions.

"Do you suppose Miss Hatherley enjoyed her success?"

They laughed.

"Why, yes, if she's like other girls."

"Perhaps she isn't. Do all girls enjoy being admired at the expense of some one else?"

Clara looked out of the window, with an assumption of unconsciousness. Betty, who is more candid, answered at once, "One can't help liking it."

I laughed outright.

"Does Miss Hatherley seem nice?" I asked next.

"Charming," said Clara. "We have taken quite a fancy to her. Mother

is writing to-day to ask her to dine and go to the theatre with us to-morrow. That was Gerald's idea."

I received this piece of news in silence.

"Everyone wants to know her," Clara went on. "Dr. Trefusis was overwhelmed with questions and inquiries as to whether people might call, and so on. She paints all day through; works quite hard, as though she had to do it. Odd, isn't it?"

"Why odd?" said I. "I suppose she likes it. But a passion for art is unnecessary in a pretty woman, no doubt." And Betty broke in with, "Oh, there you go again, Mary! Always finding fault with pretty women."

"Not with them, my dear, but with the world," I said, laughing. "You can't say I find fault with you, Betty."

"Oh, I'm not pretty," said she, "by Miss Hatherley."

I was touched by her speech.

"You're a generous creature," I said. "I have always supposed it a mistake to think that one pretty girl is jealous of another."

Betty put her head on one side, and, with an odd mixture of wisdom and drollery, answered:

"Well, we like beauty—and we don't. We like it because it's interesting, and exciting, and successful; and a pretty girl gives one's house a certain reputation. We don't approve when she annexes people who belong to us, naturally; all the same, we can't help feeling she must do as she pleases—she's privileged."

"I had no idea you were so profound," said Clara, a little sharply; and I wondered whether it is possible that women are more tenacious of an intellectual than of a physical superiority.

Betty only laughed.

"I'm off," said she. "I promised to meet the Sturgises in the park; but Gerald won't come, and I'm half afraid to face Bella alone. Good-bye, Mary. We'll ask you to meet Miss Hatherley when we know her better."

When I got home I found that Dr. Trefusis had sent on Lady Harman's letter. I sat over it for some time, thinking; then I wrote and said I would go. Miss Whateley looked at me wistfully when I told her.

"I'm afraid you will get into some trouble, Mary," she said, "and you can't possibly wear the ball dress."

"I must go," I retorted. "I am at last seeing life as a woman ought to see it. I can't give up the privilege; at least not yet."

"You won't give it up till you have paid the penalty," Miss Whateley answered.

I shrugged my shoulders, as though I did not believe her.

"I must have another dress," I cried.

Miss Whateley would have given me the clothes off her back, she said ; but as that would not avail me much, she offered to lend me some money. I accepted the offer with a recklessness born of my strange position ; and we went out shopping, after sunset ; Mary Hatherley and Miss Whateley.

The people in the shops seemed anxious to please me, even when they found that I could afford to pay but little for what I wanted ; they probably looked upon me as a good advertisement, and I enjoyed the novelty of being treated with a deferential consideration.

It was a very cold night ; as we passed along the freezing, gas-lit streets we met but few people ; we had to cross the square in which Dr. Trefusis lived on our way home ; I noticed, before we reached his door, that a man in a fur overcoat was pacing slowly up and down the pavement. Why did he linger in such weather? I wondered vaguely. Then I saw it was Gerald Harman. I put my muff up to my face and passed him by. I knew, too well, that he was waiting on the chance of seeing Mary Hatherley on her way home from a day's work at the studio.

"You do not work very late these foggy days, I suppose?" he asked me, tentatively, the next evening at dinner.

"I make gaslight studies," said I, shortly.

"Is it permitted to anybody to go and see you at work?"

"Oh no," I answered, with a smile. "I paint in earnest."

"I waited an hour in Dorchester Square last night," he went on, very low, "in the hope of seeing you."

"That was misplaced heroism," said I, "in such weather. I should advise you not to do it again."

"I shall do it every evening," he declared ; and I only laughed a little, as though the subject were not of the remotest interest, and turned to my neighbour.

Gerald sat by me at the play. I went so seldom to the theatre that I was always arrested by the interest of the piece, and of the actors. I sat in the front of the box by Lady Harman ; who, I was certain, suffered under the uneasy sensation that she was taking a leap in the dark in encouraging a young unknown woman, with nothing to recommend her but her looks ; though, on the other hand, she was upheld by the authoritative voice of society, which had pronounced a favourable verdict on me.

Behind us were Gerald and Betty. It was such an intimate family party that I had great difficulty in not using the familiar tone of every day. When I had only just saved myself from calling Betty by her Christian name, and pointing out an acquaintance of Gerald's, whom I knew by sight, in the stalls, I was sobered.

Silence fell upon me : I was so acutely aware of Gerald's presence, which seemed like a light at which I could not bear to look, that I tried to distract myself by noting the faces of the other people in the house till the curtain should rise. Here and there I caught glimpses of a pretty head ; the graceful turn of a neck ; an expression of happiness or of vivacity ; but the audience was mostly ugly, dull, and uninteresting : yet I felt sorry for all these people ; for their inarticulate dumb way of going through life, untouched by passion, save in its baser aspects, and only apprehending the ideal through some conventionalized form of religion, or some dim discontent.

The play was "Romeo and Juliet" : the Juliet was beautiful, but she could only look the part ; and the young man who acted Romeo was no ideal lover ; yet the immortal, golden play of youth and passion drew tears, and quickened heartbeats ; for each woman in the house was Juliet, tasting some rapture, perhaps lost, perhaps never realized, of first love.

The curtain dropped : I sat in a dream, and Lady Harman's voice seemed to come from very far away.

"It's a pretty play," she said. "But don't you think it's rather a muddle ? I never can make out who is who."

"It doesn't matter," answered Betty. "Don't trouble, mother dear. What a lovely thing it would be for private theatricals, parts of it, that is. Gerald, wouldn't Bella make a good Juliet ?"

Her remark might, or might not have been malicious ; but Gerald started. "Bella !" he ejaculated, and looked at me. His look said plainly what his lips had not yet dared ; no man had ever yet looked at me with entreaty, passion, humility, in his eyes. I looked back at him, the soul of Mary Gower speaking through the eyes of Mary Hatherley. He flushed, and went pale again, and I regretted what I had done. For the rest of the evening I devoted myself to Lady Harman : Gerald seemed lost in thought, and only roused himself when the carriage stopped at Dr. Trefusis' door.

"I shall never see you alone," said he, as we stood on the doorstep. "I cannot talk to you—I must write to you," he ended, with a sort of despairing impatience.

"Do not write," said I : and then the door was opened by the doctor in

person. Gerald seemed hardly able to speak to him ; when a few words had passed he went back abruptly to the carriage.

"Mary," said Dr. Trefusis, "you are a great trouble to me. Now I've got to take you home, and interrupt my studies in Rosenkrantz and the Pope Honorius, most absorbing old impostors—no, I won't say that ; for I'm beginning to think there may be some method in their madness. You have led me into devious paths, Mary Hatherley. By the way, who's that good-looking young fellow?"

"That's Gerald Harman," said I.

The doctor looked at me with a sort of inquisitive sympathy ; and shrugged his shoulders. When he left me at my own house, "You are playing with fire, my dear," he said ; "and I'm an old fool to help you."

"You are helping me to buy the experience that teaches," I said, "and it teaches bitter lessons enough : don't fear for me."

CHAPTER VI

I had never received a love-letter ; and the only scrap of Gerald Harman's writing that I possessed was a little note, which said :

"Dear Miss Gower, my mother asks me to write and tell you that she will be back to-morrow, and expects you on Thursday as usual. Yours very truly,

"GERALD HARMAN."

I sat comparing this letter, with the letter he had written to Mary Hatherley, and I do not think I have ever known a more miserable moment.

"I ought to begin by asking you to forgive me," the letter ran. "I am afraid of your thinking me too bold in writing ; yet you must know that love comes sometimes in a sort of flash that makes one see life quite differently in a moment. That is what happened to me the first time I ever saw you. Since then I have thought of nothing else. If you would be kind, if you would care what becomes of me, I might be able to make a better thing of life. I have been very idle and useless always, and now I feel ashamed of it. I dare not ask if you could ever care for me—not yet. You know how I love you, and am ever yours

"GERALD HARMAN."

I was sitting in my bedroom, at the little dressing-table which did duty for a writing-table too: I looked again into my own eyes in the glass, as I had done on that memorable evening that seemed such a very long while ago: we knew one another's bitterness, my reflection and I, and laughed aloud.

"Man's love," said I to the face in the glass, "man's humility, man's cry of 'trample on me, and re-mould me,' what does it all amount to? Here am I; the same woman, with two faces; the woman counts for nothing; the face determines my life. A man can only see inspiration in eyes that are beautiful; words can only influence him when the lips that say them have curves and a smile that delight. I, Mary Gower, could love him, could help him, as far as my soul and will go; but he cannot see this: a man sees only with the outer, never with the inner eye."

"Perhaps we are unjust," I went on again presently. "There are, no doubt, men to whom the outside of a woman is not the whole; but they must have learnt discernment, either through some special suffering, or they are perhaps lacking in sensuous instincts, and care but little for women at all, either from the intellectual or the emotional side. Gerald is not one of these; he is like other men; his point of view may be fairly taken as representing a normal one—and he loves Mary Hatherley!"

"Come in," I went on, in answer to a knock at the door. "There's going to be no transformation to-night, Whatty. I'm tired of masquerading; I am very tired of life; I was born too serious. I can't live in the passing hour, and enjoy it; I think of yesterday, and of to-morrow. Why can't I fling all care to the winds and make merry, with the other Mary's beautiful face, and all it brings me!"

Miss Whateley put her hands on my shoulder, and I turned to her, and wept.

I did not answer Gerald's letter; nor did I see him till a few days later, when he strolled into Lady Harman's study in his usual careless way.

"I'm out of sorts, Mary," said he. "Let me sit here, while you talk to me. I like the sound of your voice."

I knew why he liked the sound of my voice, and it hardened me against him.

"Why out of sorts?" said I. "Haven't you eaten, drunk, and been merry? What more does a man want?"

"I've eaten less, drunk considerably more, and not been in the least

merry," he answered. "Just now I wish that I might die—to-morrow, or even to-day."

I looked at him with a sudden pity mixed with my anger—that pity which is at once the root and the flower of love.

"You are unhappy, really?" I asked, knowing that Mary Hatherley had not answered his letter.

"I'm miserable!" he cried out.

Then he began walking up and down the room, and I felt, with a quickening of fear and interest, that he was going to speak to me of her. I yielded then to a strange impulse, which was almost like jealousy of myself.

"What has Bella Sturgis been doing?" said I.

He stopped dead.

"Bella . . . she seems to have drifted a thousand miles away. She belongs to the old life, from which I am cut off: there's a gulf opened between me and it; she is on the other side."

"I don't understand, then," said I.

"O Mary," Gerald cried, "I'm very hard hit this time! Haven't you heard of Mary Hatherley?"

"Tell me about her," I said.

There was a great fire in the room, and I sat close to it; but my hands were like ice. Gerald leant against the mantelpiece, and looked down on me. He was full of that intoxicating spirit of youth and enthusiasm, which carries such an irresistible appeal to those whose own youth is clouded, and who cannot rise above a resigned cheerfulness. Even now, when he declared himself to be miserable, there was an ardour in his discouragement which made it almost a desirable emotion.

"Mary Hatherley," he began, "reminds me in some strange way of you: she says things so like what you say, and the very voice is like."

"But she's very lovely," I interposed. "And you've fallen seriously in love at last?"

He did not resent my remark.

"Seriously—at last," he answered, with a smile.

"Why have you never fallen in love with me?" I asked then.

He began to laugh, with genuine amusement.

"You're an amazing person," said he; "I shall, if you're not careful."

"Well, but why not?" I persisted. "It's true that I am only your mother's secretary, but you say I'm like Miss Hatherley in my ideas and way of talking. Is it the face that makes the difference?"

"I know you are following up something infernally abstruse," said he, "that has no relation to the facts of life; that's so like you. I daresay the face *does* make a difference: it make a difference in the whole personality."

"I wanted to find out the facts," said I. "And you have given me a fairly direct answer, which can serve as a premise from which I shall draw my conclusions."

"And your conclusions are ——?"

"That justice is an ironical goddess, whose eyes are never really bandaged."

"Your vein is too deep for me to-day. I wanted to tell you all my troubles, and you talk to me as though I were a professor."

"I didn't mean to be unkind," said I. "If you are really serious, I'm sorry."

"Sorry, why sorry?" he asked, quickly.

"It's such an old story. You fall in love with a girl's beautiful face—it's not the first time you've done it; you endow her with all sorts of qualities; you make her into an idol; and the whole thing only means that your æsthetic sense is gratified. That's a poor way of loving."

"It's a very real way," said Gerald, with some warmth. "I think you are horribly unsympathetic."

"I am in earnest," I answered. "A very short while ago you were quite taken up with Bella Sturgis; you don't care the least for her feelings; you simply follow your impulses, and desert her for a more attractive woman."

I do not know what made me espouse Bella's cause; perhaps I was hurt, more than I had time to realize, and seized on the first weapon to my hand.

"You don't spare *my* feelings," Gerald said, in a low voice. "All I can say is, that if Mary Hatherley won't have anything to do with me, I shall go away; I shall go and shoot big game—anything to get out of this horrible place. I *am* in earnest. I wasn't in earnest about Bella; I admired her very much, and all that, and mother is always urging me to marry; I should probably have drifted into marrying her ——," he broke off.

I felt an unreasoning anger against him.

"Poor Bella!" I cried. "You may drift into marrying her yet."

That finished our conversation. He went away without another word, leaving me alone with my anger and my heartache.

CHAPTER VII

I CONFESS that about this time I was led astray and over-mastered by conflicting emotions. My work, and my battles with Lady Harman's peculiarities, became unutterably irksome. I forgot how to efface myself; I spoke at the wrong moment, and on the wrong subject: I did not remember to be sympathetic, and I expected sympathy; in fact, I confused what was permitted to Mary Hatherley, with what was permitted to Mary Gower, with the result that I drank the cup of bitterness each day, the cup of triumph each night.

At this time I was much sought after; my devotion to art was supposed to denote genius, though it was hardly respectable, and wholly unnecessary; but people forgave me my persistent refusal to see anyone, or to go anywhere during the day, and asked me to their houses in the evening.

I was often chaperoned by Lady Harman, sometimes by Dr. Trefusis himself. I had many admirers, but I only remember them vaguely, like figures in a dream. The golden key that opened their hearts led me into strange places; some had never been tenanted, and were so cold and bare that I felt they could never be really warm or pleasant; others had been swept and garnished, and I was asked to believe that all traces of their former occupants were gone; others were full of rust and cobwebs, and old toys broken and thrust away; there was no room even for a new plaything. The key unlocked no sanctuary, with altar-lights and incense burning, waiting for the one divinity that was to fill its empty shrine. Those who loved me had loved before, and would love again.

Women, whose idol is success, worshipped me too, in their curious fashion; it became desirable in their eyes to be known as the friend of Mary Hatherley; a note of distinction was thus sounded: they were proud to demonstrate the fact that they were above jealousy, or fear of rivalry.

I liked many of them, with a liking tempered by amusement. I am glad to think now that I did not interfere wantonly with their lovers, their husbands, or their sons. I was discreet, to the verge of being disagreeable: indeed, had it not been for my face, I think they might almost have resented my indifference to their male belongings; and taken it as a personal affront.

I saw a great deal of Gerald, in the character of Mary Hatherley: the frost held, and he remained in London without a murmur; he was not much at home during the day; and Mary Gower had no speech with him alone.

"Something has happened to Gerald," Betty said one day. "I mean besides this business about Mary." They called her Mary by this time. "He wanders about picture galleries, I've found out; and some one saw him the other day in the British Museum. Isn't that somewhere in the city?"

"Not quite so bad," said I. The city had been Betty's terror, ever since she had been taken to the Tower as a child. "But isn't Mr. Harman merely improving his mind?"

"Yes, but why?" cried his sister. "He's done very well all these years without it. It isn't as though he were the sort of man who could do nothing else. He can ride and shoot better than any man I know. Why should he want to improve his mind?"

Her somewhat incoherent speech amused me; and it was true: a superficial culture would have sat oddly on Gerald Harman; whose charm lay in his simplicity, and a certain gallant bearing that might have fitted him to be the hero of a romance of the Elizabethan age; in which men were either knights or shepherds; full of a natural bravery, and keenly susceptible to the influence of women's beauty.

"Miss Hatherley is an artist," I suggested, in answer to Betty's remarks. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Mary Hatherley's just flirting with him," said she.

This was true: I had answered his letter; not in writing, nor indeed by any explicit word of mouth; but I had been kind, and had let him see that the letter had not displeased me; I had also led him to understand that the time was not yet come for any more open speech on his part. I was capricious: I used my power with but little mercy: these were days when I made him miserable; and days when I knew the world was re-created for him by my kindness.

Yet I was more wretched than I had ever been when I was only Mary Gower: I grew to hate the other Mary's beautiful face; her smile; the gracious turn of her head; her shapely hands: I grew to hate all this with a passionate intensity that frightened me. I seemed to have realized Mary Hatherley in a strange, objective way, as distinct from myself: she was the woman Gerald Harman loved; she was the woman I should have been, and was not; and then came a heart-stricken moment when I knew she was the woman who had done both Gerald and another a wrong that might never be undone.

It happened in this wise: I had gone down one day to the girls' sitting-room to fetch a book I had left there, when I met Gerald on the stairs. He

passed me by with the briefest possible word ; and with a look of annoyance on his face, that I was at a loss to account for, till I reached the sitting-room, and found Bella Sturgis there.

She was sitting with her face on her arms, by the writing-table, and I could see that she was crying. My instinct was to leave her ; but I was not quick enough to escape her notice, and she turned upon me with an angry movement.

"Why didn't you knock?" said she.

In her confusion and distress she mistook me for a servant : I should have laughed, had I not been overcome by the conviction that Gerald had just left her ; and that something had passed between them, which was connected with Mary Hatherley.

"I am sorry if I disturbed you," said I. "I have come for a book I left here."

Then she saw her mistake, and flushed red.

"I beg your pardon ; I really didn't see—" she said ; and then, as though bowed down by the weight of her own distress, she dropped her head again on her hands.

I did not know what to do : it seemed an intrusion to remain ; and impossible to go.

"Forgive me," I said, at last. "You are in some trouble. I have intruded upon you unknowingly ; I can't go away without saying I wish I could do something for you."

She looked up at me, with manifest surprise ; tears shone still upon her face, and in her eyes : I wondered that Gerald had left her, even for Mary Hatherley.

"Why should you care?" she asked.

"I'm always sorry for another woman," I said.

She looked at me again, with a miserable, uncertain air ; her haughty self-confidence had gone from her, and I felt emboldened to speak again.

"You may not know that I am Lady Harman's secretary. I have been in the house all day for a long while ; and I can't help seeing a great deal of what goes on in it. I know your trouble, Miss Sturgis."

She got up at that ; and looked for a moment as though she would have struck me ; then she suddenly lost her self-control, and burst into tears. Those tears were dreadful to me : I took her hand, and soothed her as though she had been a child ; and presently she sat down beside me.

"How do you know?" she said. "You can't know."

"I've heard them talk of Mary Hatherley," said I.

"And I suppose they say I'm breaking my heart?" cried she, with a desperate attempt at scorn.

"They would not be far wrong," I answered.

She gave a long sigh.

"It hurts," she said, quite simply.

Shame and an aching remorse seized me. I had taken him from her; and had roused in him a love which must be always barren. I had surely put a knife into Bella's heart; and her simple words stabbed me back. Did I not know it hurt! I carried the self-same wound.

"Do you care for him so much?" I said.

At first she would not answer, and frowned, while the tears came into her eyes; then she said, brokenly.

"Yes—but we used to quarrel, and now it's all over."

"Do you think," I went on, "that if Mary Hatherley were to go away you could win him back?"

She pondered: I watched her beautiful face, and thought that I had hitherto misjudged her: her pride, the insolence of her beauty, her caprices, had been but the superficial manifestation of a passionate spirit; led astray by a world which cared only for the outer woman. Now that these things had been flung back in her face, her heart spoke: she lost the sense of her beauty, and its rights; and was more lovely than she had ever been, and did not know it.

"He used to love me, I'm sure," she said. "I believe he would again—I would not be so unkind—Oh, but what's the use of talking!"

I hardly heard the sound of my own voice as I answered her; there was a singing in my ears.

"I think he has been led away by a pretty face. I daresay he does not care for the real Mary Hatherley; he may return; be kind to him when he does."

"Oh, I will, I will," said she. "You have made me feel happier—I was so unhappy."

She bent forward impulsively, and kissed me. I kissed her back. "I am so glad," I said, and left the room hurriedly, to hide my emotion.

On my way home I went to see Dr. Trefusis. I found him alone, sitting over a pile of great folio volumes. His study, where I had so often found a refuge from the ills of life, looked warm and cheerful, with its shelves of books

from floor to ceiling, and great, open hearth. He appeared to rouse himself with some difficulty, and I noticed he looked older, and very wearied.

"I'm not come to disturb you," said I. "Let me sit by the fire whilst you read. I have something I want to think out."

"It will do me good to talk, child," he answered. "I've been poring over these books for too long. What is it you have to think over, Mary?"

"Only the old thing."

He looked at me with a quickened attention.

"I've been thinking over it too," he said.

Then he sat down on the other side of the fire-place; the room was aglow with the flames, and the bright light of two lamps; there seemed also to be a strange light on Dr. Trefusis' face.

"You know, Mary," he began solemnly, "that this case of yours has led me into strange studies, and strange speculations. They are all wicked; I am going to put away my books, for I begin to fear lest they should take me into places where madness lies, outside the phenomenal, where we were never meant to penetrate. You have shown me how human longing, if it be powerful enough, is nearly omnipotent, for evil as well as for good. Here, in these old books, in the *Magia Naturalis* of Johannes Faust, in this old Latin of Cornelius Agrippa, and many others, I learn how spirits 'can be dragged out of the air'; how alchemy can turn metal to gold: these things have a terrible fascination; but it is of the devil; I shall put them all away. Your longing turned Mary Gower, whom God made, into Mary Hatherley in whom He has no part."

He looked at me, with a shudder.

"The church put the alchemists to death for a less sin," he said. "This power you have brings you nothing but trouble: it may bring trouble to those you do not wish to injure. Mary, I implore you to stop, before it is too late."

All this in the mouth of Dr. Trefusis; the keen scientist, the ardent advocate of materialism; surprised me much. The gravity of his tone, so far removed from his ordinary carelessness, carried authority. All he said was my own inward, but unformulated conviction, put into words.

I asked him why he thought it might bring trouble to others.

"I have seen enough," he answered, "to understand your relations with the Harmans. It won't do, Mary. That young Harman ought not to be sacrificed to your love of experimentalizing."

At that I got up, and walked about the room.

"You do me injustice," said I. "I may have given way to a curiosity

which, taken alone, would not be legitimate, but my heart was concerned in this matter."

"Ah," said he. "I feared so."

I sat down on a stool at his feet, and gave him all my confidence. He did not interrupt me; and when I had finished, we were both silent for a long while.

"Do you not feel yourself, that such a state of things cannot go on?" he said, at last.

"I am determined to give it up," I answered. "To-morrow night shall be Mary Hatherley's last appearance."

"Why let her appear again at all?" he asked.

"Because I'm a woman: and I want to say good-bye to Gerald Harman."

The doctor laughed; I think to cover some emotion.

"Well, well, well," he said. "Have it so if you will. But be done with the thing: it's unholy: it's a work of the devil. There are more things in heaven and earth than ever I dreamt of in my philosophy; things I dare not tamper with. Now, Mary, will you climb to the top of the ladder, and put away Faustus, and Agrippa, and the rest? I've had enough of them."

We spent some time putting away the books: strange volumes; full of odd, symbolical drawings, and with wonderful titles, such as: "The Golden Tripod": "The Glory of the World, or the Gate of Paradise": "The All-Wise Doorkeeper."

The doctor crossed himself, as I put the last one in its place; and I laughed, in spite of my trouble.

"I've one thing more to say," he cried, turning suddenly on me. "I'm getting old, Mary, and I want a housekeeper, and a daughter. You refused me these once; you shall not refuse again. You and Miss Whateley must come and take charge of me. I promise you I'll age rapidly, and then you'll feel you are fulfilling a duty—a sensation dear to the soul of woman, I know."

We sat there over the fire for another hour. Before I left him, my promise had been given.

CHAPTER VIII

I woke the next morning with something of that indifference to life, which is the secret of so many peaceful deaths.

Mary Hatherley was condemned ; she had but a brief hour left, and I knew not how she was to spend it : I only knew that she had to bid good-bye to Gerald Harman. The present hung before me like a veil ; I could see the dim future moving behind it ; a spectral army of figures all in gray ; but they marched, this colourless procession of the years, with a monotony that grew into peace.

The thought of Mary Hatherley hardly troubled me ; I did not care ; I had passed through many deaths since that night when she had been born in all her beauty ; for is not, "every step we take in life a death in the imagination" ? I had held Beauty's sceptre, and had seen men slaves beneath it : I knew the isolation, the penalty of this greatness. Yet I owned that it was an empire for which it might well be worth paying : I held no theories based on mere sentiment ; I owned that beauty might not possess all things ; yet the woman who has not beauty neither has, nor pays. To this philosophy, or cynicism, I know not which to call it, had Mary Hatherley's experiences brought me.

I spent a strange day at Lady Harman's : the familiar place seemed unreal : in a week or two I should be gone, and all my days there would fade into the past ; for I knew that I had no real hold on the lives of any of them ; having come only as it were by accident into their midst ; when they had treated me with as much kindness as was consistent with their education, their traditions, and the world in which they lived. Betty would marry one of her many lovers ; and Clara some one who fed her intellectual vanity. And Gerald ? I held my heart in check at the thought of Gerald.

I had met him first, as Mary Hatherley, in a crowd : it seemed like the logic of fate that I should take leave of him in a crowd ; for our relations belonged to no world of peace and quietness, but to an order of life where Beauty, with her attendant pomp and circumstance, moved to the sound of music, and under the glare of a revealing light.

That evening we did not dance : there was singing, and stringed instruments ; we moved about white stately rooms, where the music followed us like a memory. I spoke to many people, and knew nothing of what I said : at my

heart was torture, in my soul peace. The rest of the world was blotted out when I saw Gerald coming to me.

At first he spoke but little; he had the desperate air of a man who is determined to know his fate—and his silence was charged with suggestion. We stood for a long while near the musicians, and the aching sweetness of one of Schubert's melodies pierced me with the sword of pain and pleasure where-with music wounds her lovers. The whole measure of my grief seemed contained in that searching, divine air; in the human, passionate note of the strings; in the purer, more radiant tone of the flutes and hautboys.

Then Gerald looked into my eyes, and said, "Let us come away"; and I went blindly with him through the rooms, till we reached a door that opened into a garden.

The night was hardly cold, and very still; only a faint throbbing from the far-away streets lay at the heart of the silence, and troubled it. I could see the outline of Gerald's face in the starlight; he said nothing, but took me suddenly in his arms and kissed me; and in that moment I tasted the essence of life. Then he let me go. "Now send me from you if you can—if you dare," said he.

"'Tis I who am going," I said.

"I am in earnest," answered he, "and I must have your answer."

"Oh, my answer," I cried, "is easily given. I do not love you. I can add something to that which you will not acknowledge. You have never loved me; you loved my face, but of my heart and soul you have known nothing."

I had not meant to say such words to him; I had meant to let him go with something like a benediction; but my bitterness rose up and made me speak.

"It is true I love your face," he said, quite gently. "But more than that. Why are you so unkind to me?"

Then there came a wild moment in which I was near telling him all; and asking him if he could not love the soul of me, and take no thought for my body: but I paused, and remembered I had resolved never to let him know.

"I am not as unkind as I seem," I said. "It is kinder to tell you the truth. I am not made for love, or to be happy, and have children. I must live apart: do not ask me why; I cannot tell you. I shall not forget you; I hope you will forget me—at least, think of me without pain. And now, good-bye." I moved away.

"Is this your last word? Are you going to leave me so?" he cried out.

I stopped then, and looked back at him : the notes of a violin came through the silence like a shaft, and struck at my heart ; they mingled with a woman's voice, in a love-song. I went to his side.

" I have one last word to leave you," I said to him. " You will forget me. When I am only a memory, go back to Bella ; for you loved her."

He said nothing, and I was glad of the darkness, which covered my face. I turned back into the house, leaving him standing there ; and went away, bidding no farewells.

I sat through that long night, and waited for the dawn ; and when the dawn came, I kissed the wonderful reflected face of Mary Hatherley, and wished her a long good-bye.

" O face of my dreams," I said, " it is well that you should go back into nothingness ; your hour is over ; each moment held a possible joy ; a surer pain : a brief triumph ; a long regret. Let me decline into the lesser ways of life, where Beauty's flying feet have never passed ; but where Peace may be seen stealing, a shadowy figure, with eyes looking towards the sun."

O. SHAKESPEAR.