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The Stone of Destiny

by

Katherine Mackay

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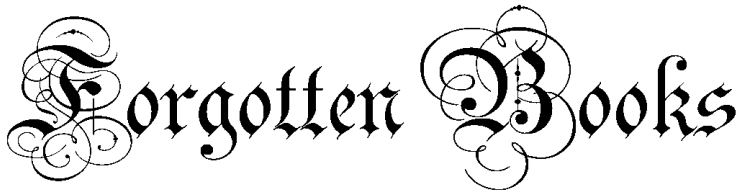

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Alchemy

"In changing the base metals into gold and silver by the projection of the Stone, it follows (by an accelerated process) the method of nature, and therefore is natural."

The New Pearl of Great Price, by Peter Bonus, 1338 AD

THE STONE OF DESTINY

THE STONE OF DESTINY

BY

KATHERINE
MACKAY

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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Published March, 1904.

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO THE ONE FOR WHOM IT WAS WRITTEN

THE STONE OF DESTINY

I

THERE is a fine old house somewhere in Touraine — a house which has been a silent witness of the coming and going of many generations of men and women who lived and suffered and loved through the history of France — a house built in the time of Louis XI. for a woman of manlike strength and passions, whose personality persevered through many of her descendants even to the present day, flashing forth in their worst as well as their finest deeds, in their quick temper, their great love.

In this house remained the room in which that Theodora slept—a big, stone room, as cold and severe as the lady herself, until, some two hundred years ago, the Theodora of that day found the plain walls and dark furniture an unbecoming and uncomfortable background for her dainty personality, and hung fine tapestries on the walls, and placed a great gold bed between the windows, and filled the room with quaintly luxurious furniture in which she indolently idled her life away.

To-day the curtains are drawn; and through a single window there penetrates so little light that the faded figures in the tapestries serve only to keep a dim vigil on the sleeping woman lying in the bed.

The chimes of the tower clock sound the hour, and with a sigh the sleeper stirs and wakes and turns to the tiny scrap of hu-

manity snuggling close against her. With searching eyes she looks into the baby's face, questioning the lineless and delicately veined forehead. She smiles, because she sees the answer to her heart's wish written on that soft, clear brow.

Gently she lifts the sleeping babe and folds it to her breast, whispering: "You will be what I could not be; you must do what your father would not do; and I shall show you the way. And, boy, you must trust me with all your soul, and, relying upon my guidance, fulfil the mission to which you are born. Few may boast of such a one, for you are the child of love. I shall open the small part of nature which I know to your understanding, teaching you the difference between right and wrong. Because you are what you are, you will go far beyond me."

The infant's brow wrinkles, the little face puckering into a caricature of itself; its eyes open, and in their depths the mother sees an evil look, as though a demon-sprite had stolen her baby from her arms and left a changeling in its stead. For an instant she gazes, fascinated as by an evil thing, and as she looks, with all her love beating in her breast, the baby smiles and yawns and is its placid, little, sleepy self again. And as the mother continues to muse of the future, seeing in her imagination all his life unfold before her until he reaches his destiny, her eyes are closed in sleep, and she stands at the foot of a hill which she must ascend. The road is hard, and her feet are weary when she reaches the top. Because she has reached the summit her being rejoices, and she smiles. But the smile dies on her lips, for

she stands face to face with that same changeling sprite, and it speaks in a strangely familiar voice and says, "I am your retribution."

SOME twenty years have passed. Again the stately mansion by the river. Theodora and her son sit in the tapestried room, reading by the soft, warm light of the shaded lamps.

Time has passed as gently over her golden head as he has touched the faded ladies on the walls. The years seem to have been a caress, serving but to enhance her strange beauty with the marks of sympathy and sadness they have imprinted in their wake.

Presently the boy closed his book and looked at his mother earnestly. Uncon-

scious of his scrutiny, the thoughts of her heart flitted across her troubled brow and revealed their weariness in the lines around her mouth. And the son noted what a curiously fascinating face it was—how straight and pure of line, how full of something hiding in the shadows of her eyes which he had never understood.

The lustre of her red-gold hair had held the illusion of perpetual youth as a halo around her face, of a youth which is not stationary, but feeds upon the years, making them relinquish their mastery and yield wisdom and experience without demanding the usual price.

Gentle she always seemed, ever willing to extend to another a helping hand, full of sympathetic understanding. And what beautiful, small, strong hands they were!

Theodor saw the manner in which they held the book she was reading, and he wondered if the writing in the palms told her mystery.

She sighed, closed the book, raised her eyes to his, and said:

"What is it, Theodor? Does the reading weary you so easily? It tired me, too, at your age. I felt as if, when the day should come that I might leave teachers and classes behind me, I could really live. For a little while I did, and was happy, too. But one evening—it was after a grand ball—I came into this room, and it seemed as though scales dropped from my eyes and I saw how useless I was and how lonely this room. Why?—I wondered. I looked around — because there was nothing *alive* in it. Tapestries on the walls—yes, furniture, too, in plenty and beauty, but

not a *living* thing to give companionship. So, in the days which followed, one by one, carefully and tenderly, I collected and arranged my old books. Many new friends they helped me to know; but, after all, the best companionship we get is from those who wait through months and years upon their shelves, asking for nothing, yet always ready to yield wisdom and joy and sorrow to the last word on the last page. How often have I come here and felt grateful for their friendship and their sympathy!"

As she spoke Theodor felt she could read his thoughts, so clear and straight was the glance from her gray-blue eyes.

"But, mother," he answered, "I love this hour we spend together every evening. I was not tired of the book. I was looking at you. It always seems to me

that you are sad through me, as if I worried you. Do I?"

"No, dear," she smiled; "you are happiness itself to me; it is for you alone I live."

"And yet there is a dark shadow somewhere, for I feel it. Do tell me; I really could understand."

His voice was very persuasive.

"Theodor, shall I read you the story I have finished? Perhaps you may see why I looked sad. It was written many years ago, but has just been published."

She opened the book and began to read, in a voice which sounded far away:

The King's daughter walked out of the palace door and stood on the terrace steps. The dawn was lifting the night mists from the distant mountains, but the gardens be-

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She had clothed herself in the clinging robe of silver thread which she had worn in that moment when his lips had awakened her inmost being. Her golden hair was twisted loosely at her neck, and framed her beautiful white face with curling softness. She was so pure and fair, so like a stray moonbeam forgotten by the night, that the stars paused for an instant in their flight towards the dawn, and marvelled that an earth-child could radiate such beauty.

She held three gifts for her beloved in her hand—the Thread of Life, the Image of Love, and the Stone of Destiny. And as she stood and waited the hour passed.

The cold wind of the dawn dissolved the darkness from each recess in the street. The Princess shivered as she looked in vain for him she loved.

The wind grew stronger and seemed to penetrate and chill the warmth within her heart. She had asked him to come on this day—their day of the year, and he would not. The woman instinct in her felt that, had she been the man, nothing could have come between them. She raised her hand to still the beating of her waiting heart, and as she did so the cruel wind tore the Thread of Life from her grasp and floated it away with the night-shadows. It fluttered on the air, glittering dimly, and then vanished in the distance.

Each moment seemed, in passing, to stamp a half-formed dread into her mind that Hope was dying. A distant echo from the street took up the pulse within her heart, and the rhythm seemed to say:

"Hope is dead, resting in the golden days of the years that were. Call not to

thy beloved, for he will not hear thee. Let him sleep in thy memory, for he is beautiful."

Then the rain began to fall, and the Princess placed the Image of Love in her breast so it should not be harmed.

She waited still, for she could not think he would fail to come to her.

A hammering on the scaffold in the market-place and the dripping of the rain filled her with dull apprehension.

She took the tablet from her breast and looked at the Image of Love and wept. Again she looked, and, behold! her tears had washed away the Image.

And as there remained but one gift, she took a locket from her neck and placed the Stone of Destiny therein for safety.

And the second hour had passed.

A gray light crept over the city; the rain ceased; no sound save the hammering in the market-place broke the calm stillness of the new day. Nature stood upon the threshold of the morning as if to measure her strength to bear the daily burden of joy and sorrow.

The Princess leaned against the gate, and the coldness of the stone and the inflexibility of the iron, symbols of man's laws, held her within the narrow limit of the royal garden.

"Freedom to go to him!" her heart cried.

"Courage to live without him!" her soul answered.

The third hour was nearly gone as the crimson light spreading in the east showed that the morning was coming over the earth.

A tramping of many footsteps sounded from the distance; louder and nearer it grew, until a regiment of soldiers turned into the street which her saddened eyes still searched for her beloved.

On they came, marching silently by the royal gate, with eyes cast down and heavy tread.

In their midst, with his arms bound to his sides, his step firm, his head erect, walked the beloved.

A strange woman, her arms bound too, was beside him.

He was speaking to her gently and lovingly, as though she alone filled this last hour.

The Princess shrank against the wall. She, too, stood erect. For one instant their eyes met, and for the first time this woman and this man understood each other.

She stood immovable; they marched on and into the market-place.

There they paused. There was an awful silence, a muffled beating of the drums, and those two had gone into the Fulfilment.

Wearily the Princess turned back into the garden and walked under the rustling leaves until she reached the terrace. Slowly she ascended the steps; the Stone of Destiny in the locket around her neck seemed heavy beyond her strength.

At the threshold of the palace door she turned. Beneath her lay the city; the sun was rising over the hills. She pushed open the heavy door, and as it closed behind her the third hour had passed.

Theodor's eyes were full of tears. The son saw that his mother had not read, but told the story, and in the silence of the

room he felt her heart quivering under his gaze.

The portière was drawn aside and her husband entered the room. His snow-white hair emphasized the difference in age between them.

He greeted Theodora and the youth, and then, drawing an arm-chair close to his wife, and sighing happily, he said:

"If you knew how glad I am to be back here with you again, out and away from the turmoil of the city! I almost wish I had no business and could live all my days peacefully with you." His eyes rested on the book in his wife's hand. "So you are reading Gray's book! I was talking to a man about it this afternoon. He told me Mrs. Gray found all these stories jumbled together in Gray's desk shortly after his death. It seems she went over them and

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a bowl of gardenias which seemed to bring an echo of the spring-time into the winter evening. One of the flowers she took between her fingers and looked at tenderly. Perhaps its fragrance was associated with a past almost forgotten, for her words came slowly, almost painfully:

"What you really *feel* you cannot control, and you should not if you could.

"The minor emotions we make our slaves to execute our bidding, and we turn them into puppets, which reflect a little of ourselves to those who walk beside us.

"Gray possessed the complete octave, but the shyness of his real self prevented his ever touching certain chords within the hearing of those whom he most desired to reach."

She was speaking to Theodor, and as she saw he understood her meaning a scarcely

perceptible smile of grateful appreciation lighted her eyes as she said:

"Now you must go."

Reluctantly her husband rose from his easy-chair, and, with Theodor's arm in his, turned away.

As the door closed behind them, Theodora took up the book again, and, walking to the window, drew back the curtain and looked out upon the river and the hills beyond. She did not see the snow nor the bleakness of the landscape, for it was summer-time again in her heart. The golden sunlight on the river shone into her soul, and the years rolled back and she was walking along the river-bank with her hand in his, knowing love, full of youth, and breathing in the fragrance of the gardenia flower he had given her.

III

THE men parted in the hall, and Theodor went to his own room. In the morning he and his mother were to start on a long journey together, far into the world through which she had promised to go with him, leading him where she had been years before.

Theodor looked around his room, selected the few things he needed to take with him, and dressed for dinner. But all the time he was mechanically moving about and giving directions to the servant a strong undercurrent of sympathy for the sorrowful heart in the room yonder throbbed

in his brain, sweeping away the barriers of convention, and leaving in their stead a true understanding of compassion for woman.

He was still under the magic of the new horizon which his mother's revelation had opened before him when he walked into the drawing-room and saw Margaret North standing beside Theodora. Perhaps his whole nature had been softened by that hour in his mother's room, for the opening of the channels of gentleness seemed to have made his heart receptive, and he yielded to the spell of the lovely girl. He was enthralled by her beauty, to which a gypsy-like quality lent a curious fascination. He was interested in this undirected mind, this untrained intelligence, which responded so readily to his sympathetic manner. He loved her eyes and her smiles, so

full of stored sunlight, so virile in the joy of sentient being.

Theodor knew it was a meeting and a parting of an hour, and he crowded the wishes, ambitions, half-expressed thoughts of his heart into his words.

He told her of this long-planned journey of the morrow, and how he was by studious work to bring his talent for painting to maturity under the guidance of the great teachers in foreign countries, so that some day he might have a ready means in his power to show beauty and hope to a world numbed by suffering and despair. Through his pictures he would speak, and their simplicity should be an exposition of what God is.

Margaret wondered at the fire in his eyes and at the extraordinary use of words which seemed to fill all he said with life.

She was proud of his evident admiration, and used her art of listening until, when they said good-night, she had promised to remember and to write to him.

His heart was not fully grown, and the flexible feelings closed upon the vision of beauty, and, feeding on it, kept it living there. In the morning mother and son started on their way.

First they went to Italy, and the boy worked earnestly. Theodora rejoiced in his growing capacity and gave wise encouragement. When she saw that he was becoming influenced by the emotions and passions of mankind, she took him on long walks and longer drives into the heart of the country, teaching him to draw his inspirations and derive his ideals from Nature, the root of all things; for she lived in constant dread of that retribution upon her own life which

she felt must come through her innocent son.

One winter night in Florence mother and son looked out upon the Arno in the twilight. The snow was falling silently into the river between them and the little stone houses which seem to grow out of the river-bed. The windows were lit up one by one, and within the squalid rooms weary shadows flitted to and fro, finishing the drudgery of a day's work. The wretched poverty brought a vision to Theodor's mind of the gorgeous kings and queens he had seen that afternoon, flaunting their luxury upon those wonderful canvases into which Titian and Veronese had stamped them as they were, full of their vainglorious selves, heedless of whence came the price of all their fine jewels and rich clothes. Again he looked into the houses

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if aught but the beauty of life penetrated into the heart of God.

And always, as he wandered through the country from village to town, Margaret's face was with him. She came to be an invisible companion, to whom all secrets, all achievements, all disappointments were known. Sometimes he wrote her long letters which must have laid the depths of his nature clearly before her eyes. Other times his heart was too full for words, and a sketch of what he saw from the mountain, of what he felt in the valley, travelled back to his love. He read what he sought in her answering letters, either in her words or between her lines.

This love grew with him, became wholly his; the magic of the spell was complete and overwhelming his happiness.

Time passed, and mother and son wan-

dered from the Old World to the New and back again, until at the end of those three *Wanderjahre* which had changed the boy into a man, they stood again on the threshold of their home.

IV

IN the morning he found Margaret kneeling in the long grass by the river, her arms full of the purple and white irises she had gathered. She seemed a wild-flower nymph herself, under the clear rays of the early sunlight, something apart and different from the world he had dwelt in, a beautiful human link in Nature's chain to which he felt there was no end.

He walked down the bank and knelt beside her in the flowers. When she saw him coming towards her she stretched her arms out to him, and the irises were scattered before him. He took her soft, warm hand

in his and kissed it. Thus, without a question, without an answer, they were pledged to each other under the clear blue sky, in the radiance of the morning, as Nature meant man and woman to be betrothed.

Then he raised her to her feet, and, leading her still farther down the bank, drew her beside him to the water's edge.

Margaret, awed by such silent love-making, whispered, "Why do you not speak to me, Theodor?"

He softly kissed her brow. "Why should I use words? They are not deep enough to convey my love. The touch of your hand answered for your heart, as I knew it would. You have been mine for three whole years, the cherished angel of my soul. Why should we seek to exchange our love in speech?"

Again he kissed her and whispered, "This is my way of telling you."

Margaret looked out upon the river and watched a boat moving slowly with the current. Theodor's glance followed hers. She saw only how small and dingy the port-holes were, how ugly the broad, flat lines of the stern. He saw the man at the tiller, the wife with the baby at her breast huddled at his feet, the daughter standing erect, with head thrown back, her torn blouse revealing her young, brown throat, her whole body tense with the eagerness of youth. The boat drifted near in passing. The girl in the ill-patched clothes turned and looked at the girl on the bank clad in soft and beautiful finery. She saw the contrast in the flash of her glance. For one moment a look of envious hate wiped the hopefulness from the sun-

tanned face; then she sullenly moved to the prow of the boat and looked down the river. Her whole body was relaxed, indifferent, hopeless.

Theodor sighed. Then he said, earnestly:

"Margaret, I wonder if my letters ever conveyed to you how keenly I feel for the great mass of the Unidentified, those who struggle without a chance from their beginning.

"The more I travelled the more I saw, in each town, in every city, the injustice in the manner of the doing of the world's work. I think I have found a way—at least, the way within my reach—of helping some.

"I have a plan to ask you to work out with me, which may be a means to help some at least to climb the high ladder of the

social scale, acquiring as they ascend ability, intelligence, and justice.

"It is our ladder as well as theirs, but our part at the top is less important than theirs at the bottom—the foundation of the structure.

"Right here, in this country around us, in the village at our gates, there are boys and girls eager to work, ignorant of what should be the base of their toil. I want to start a school in which each may learn to know the use of the tool for which he is fitted, as well as to acquire a fundamental education, thus giving them a chance—an equal chance—to work and to enjoy. The teaching should be so directed that it may bring ambition and appreciation into the earning of the daily and necessary bread.

"There must always be workers, as society is established in our civilization,

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himself the treasures of Nature's store-house; in the present, Science's wonderland of logic has opened; may not *its* benefits accrue to universal brotherhood?

"You cannot help humanity by gifts, for men and women do not want, do not need, and will not value what is theirs for nothing.

"And it is useless to feel for the workers if you do not put your own shoulder to the wheel. I have been dreaming long enough; now is the hour to *do*, and you shall share the duty and the privilege."

All the time Theodor spoke Margaret watched his face and marvelled at his words. Timidly she answered.

"I fear you will be disappointed in me, Theodor; I would not know how to help; I have never even thought or cared whose

fingers sewed my frocks, provided they were pretty.

"But," she added, prettily, "I love you, and will try."

"There are three kinds of women in this world, Margaret," he continued. "The most prevalent type is of what I call shadow-women, who drift *over* the world, and, never touching the earth, cannot know its joys nor feel its sorrows; they come and go and might as well have never been. The second is of those who find great happiness, and from that derive the stimulus to seek their vocation and fulfil it. The third and rarest is of those who meet and travel with great sorrow, and in their aching hearts find their opportunity.

"Not always are the women who stand upon the mountain-sides of history, as did

Madame Roland and her kind, the ones who accomplish the best work. Sometimes by the fireside in the small home the mother breathes into her children's ears that which shall awaken their gift and make them great upon the summits of humanity."

It seemed to Margaret as though she were struggling against an overwhelming force—known, and yet beyond her understanding. Something prompted her to speak. Perhaps it was her self striving for expression in spite of the environment stifling its existence.

"Theodor, shall this bring us happiness? I love you now as I loved you the first moment I saw you. But I feel now, as I have often felt during these years, as if I were living under an enchantment. Not the enchantment of love entirely, but as if the power of your per-

sonality overwhelmed mine. I can't express my meaning as I wish. It seems as though I feared you as much as I loved you. The effort it caused me to make when I endeavored to understand your letters, and this strange love you have for me, prevented my answers from ringing true when I read them over. Now that you are with me, close to me, as you sometimes were when you wrote, something melts within me, and all seems easy and natural."

"Dear Margaret"—and he kissed her questioning eyes very tenderly—"you must not worry over imaginary troubles.

"Real sorrows will come soon enough of their own accord, without our summons, and those we shall share as we turn the handle of the great wheel of life together.

"This is our beginning, yours and mine. Let it be full to overflowing of all this

hour may mean. To-day we stand upon the threshold. Leave your dear hand in mine, and walk into the real future, as you have in the imaginary past, as my beloved companion."

Theodor's wonderful voice, full of music and pathos and love, pleaded his cause far more effectively than the words he spoke.

Margaret took a long breath, and, smiling, gave him both her hands. "Are you making my will yours? I fear so. If I become you and cease to be me, what will happen to both of us? If love is all, there is no doubt, and doubt is here," she said, laying her hand on her breast.

"Love and doubt," he replied, "have always dwelt together in the young. Doubt is the shadow of love, which we see in the early morning of knowledge. In the noon-hour, when the sun has reached the merid-

ian, there is no shadow, but unfortunately it sometimes haunts us again before the peace of the twilight and the silence of the night."

He spoke wearily. The girl looked even more lovely than the vision he carried in his heart, but she spoke a different language. For a moment a foreboding of evil clouded his brow. Then all she had grown to be to him, and her marvellous beauty, erased the question. He took from his watch-chain a thin, gold circle, quaintly wrought and set with tiny brilliants. He kissed it, and, placing it on her little finger, looked into her face with all his love shining from his eyes.

On the instant the vision which had dwelt three years within his breast vanished from its sanctuary, and he saw it in the gaze of the woman as she clasped

her arms around his neck and gave her first caress.

The wish he had breathed as he gave her the ring had been fulfilled.

The first day they spent together far away in the great forest. The hours glided by peacefully in those green depths. Sometimes they spoke, but more often the silence of love laid its gentle spell upon their hearts; and they knew of no other world beyond.

In the afternoon shadows they walked home together, hand-in-hand, and spent the evening by Theodora's side. The joy of their day was in their hearts, and the mother saw it and understood and welcomed her son's love into her own breast.

They spoke of many things, and the spirit of Theodora's great soul dominated them as had the soft murmurs of the woods.

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ashes; and Margaret's heart contracted. The glamour of those last days seemed to shrink and vanish from within her, and there in her soul lay the same doubt. She stood still and opened her eyes wide, as though to see through her *Liebesrausch*; and perhaps because it was of yesterday and not of to-day, the perspective of reason was restored.

Coolly, calmly, she marshalled her facts and surveyed this fine, strong love of his as though it were within the grasp of her hands, for only the tangible part did she comprehend. She weighed her feeling against his; she calculated the results for her if she yielded to the strange, almost hypnotic, power his presence wielded over her. Clearly she saw it was but a half-love, this passion he awakened—more child of his creation than of hers.

There was yet time; she was still possessed of the strength of resistance; she would write to him and bid him go out of her life.

Slowly she turned down the lane which led to her own home. How short the road seemed!—for the struggle waged within her. The voice of the hours in the woods called to her; but she would not listen to its pleading. The fragrance of the breezes from the river sought to penetrate her heart; but she closed the barriers against their memories.

Common-sense rose up and led her to the accomplishment of her resolve.

She went to her own room. She took her writing-tablet over to the window, and, drawing a chair close against the sill, she wrote good-bye.

Perhaps the past was wafted through

the window in the golden light of the setting sun as it dispelled the dreary clouds; perhaps to-day was very near to yesterday, for Margaret's letter was full of sadness, and the murmur of the forest leaves was in the gentleness of what she wrote.

ABOUT a month later, one bright afternoon in June, Theodora had invited her acquaintances of the neighborhood to a garden-party. The lawn was a mass of colors; laughing and talking, men and women were gathered in groups under the old oak-trees and on the terrace and in the gardens.

A band was playing languorously, passionately, somewhere out of sight.

Margaret came late, and from the terrace steps she saw the panorama of the ever-changing scene as her eyes sought the lithe and graceful form of Theodora,

which must be somewhere among her guests. Presently Margaret recognized her in the distance and started down the steps. She was very lovely in her soft, blue gown and big, black hat as she wound her way around the tea-tables and by the gayly talking people, looking neither to the right nor to the left, walking swiftly, as was her custom, until she reached the table at which Theodora was pouring tea.

As she was greeting her hostess, Margaret suddenly saw Theodor at the next table. The realization that he was there within reach of her hand had scarcely driven a burning blush over her face when her eyes met his. For an instant there was the silence of death in Margaret's whole being—the world had ceased. Then the clatter of the teacups, the chatter of the

voices, and the strains of the music sounded deafening in her ears.

"What is it, Margaret? Are you ill?" asked Theodora.

"No — no; only a little faint. The sun is quite warm," and as she answered, both women felt the silence at Theodor's table.

Mechanically, Margaret took off her gloves and looked at the small diamond circle she wore on her little finger. Theodor had wished it on, before their parting, and she had worn it ever since. A vista of deep happiness opened in her memory of that day, and all he had said, and how tenderly he had said it, nearly persuading her with his passionate voice that she loved him as she knew he loved her.

"Can you arrange to go into the city with me some day next week? There is

to be an exhibition of wonderful pictures, which I want you to see."

Theodora's voice, as she asked the question, sounded far away; but with one of those masterful efforts, possible, at certain moments, even to the weakest woman, Margaret controlled herself and answered:

"Yes; I can go any day. I want to see those paintings, and I particularly want to see them with you. Art means everything to me when you explain it. When I am alone it is all so flat and lifeless."

"Because you are young, dear Margaret, and youth craves giving as well as taking," said Theodora, gently. "Looking at the greatest painting or reading the strongest book cannot give complete satisfaction to those who are youthful enough to face the future. Youth *must* give. It is the same in our relations with people.

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in return for a little moralizing. That is why we are friends, you and I, and I hope we always shall be," Theodora concluded.

"You should have been a man," answered Margaret, "for your vitality needs no incentive. You have something to give; your virility electrifies everything you touch."

"The man's part is far beyond my strength, for man should create from every obstacle through which he has to pass. The genius is he who conquers circumstances, finding material in each to work with, compelling everything to yield its possibility for further achievement," Theodora spoke sternly.

"To react — to be a reflection. Yet some of us find happiness even living in a mirror." Margaret paused, for Theodor left his table and came towards her.

"How well you look! It is such a long time since I have seen you," he said, with that wonderful voice which always seemed to reach the depths of her nature.

"How did you expect me to look—like a faded flower of last summer?" she answered, lightly.

Theodor laughed—with his lips; but his glance was penetrating, earnest, and she knew he saw her hands tremble and read his mastery of her in her flushing cheeks and shining eyes. Then, still smiling, he bowed and left her. He had seen what she had vainly endeavored to conceal.

Margaret resumed her conversation with Theodora, but after a few minutes she could play her part no longer, and she said:

"If you don't mind, I'll leave you, for I see a friend of mine over under the trees in the corner, and I must speak to her."

Theodora said she would see to her guests, expecting Margaret to wait until they had gone.

Margaret knew that Theodor was watching her, and she wondered whether he thought she looked well in her new gown, which was made in the simple style he admired.

She crossed the lawn and the gardens and walked into the forest—the wonderful forest, which seemed the virgin force of Nature ever ready to eliminate from consideration the works of man, its stern, tall trees keeping watch around the castle and its gardens, secure in the knowledge that some day their living branches would shade the decaying ruins of what man had erected in his pride, and the vast wilderness would reign again in peace. The leaves were whispering to one another of patience

and of the endless resurrection of spring-time and of their power to outlive most things, even though they, too, must eventually obey the final law of universal death.

Margaret walked down the wide avenue of fragrant acacia-trees and through the narrow path of cedars. Continually each turn brought another vision of herself and Theodor walking there at noon, at dusk, at night. It was over, ended, finished. She and Theodor had parted at her request. She had known, in spite of his irresistible, passionate words, that she had not felt as he did. She had realized vaguely that he was too big of heart, too strong of nature, for her to marry.

Every word of the letter she had written to him hurt her as she remembered the sentences:

"Before Chance or Destiny brings us to-

gether again upon the road of life, I must stretch out my hand to you and bid you meet me as your friend. . . . Love such as yours I cannot find within my heart to give. . . . Good-bye. I have no courage for further words. I know you understand."

And yet to-day she almost felt as she knew he felt. She hated the calculating instinct which had compelled her to break from him.

She wanted him. She wanted to feel his arms around her, his kisses on her face—those kisses soft as the fluttering of birds' wings against her cheek.

What did it matter, this career of his? She could fill his youth. He might even help her to see the strange, unknown treasures he seemed to find in the colors of the sunlight, in the shadows of the woods.

She turned back in the direction of the house. She would send for him, ask him to come and walk along the river with her, and tell him her letter was all a mistake; that love was life and sorrow was duty.

And his ambition—what would become of that? Again she turned, this time towards the river.

No—it was best to leave matters as they were. He would go on without her; and she—well, she was young, and the present meant less to her than the future.

To play the game squarely had always been her pride. She knew that the half-value of her awakened passion would surely crush the fulness of his powers. So Margaret walked along slowly under the spreading branches, thankful for the pleasure she derived from the fragrance of the acacia blossoms.

After all, Theodor was but an incident, disturbing, uncontrollable, but yet only an incident. Margaret began to plan another future for herself with another sort of hero.

"Margaret!" Theodor's voice sounded close behind her, but she thought it was only ringing in her fancy.

"Margaret!" and Theodor touched her arm.

"Margaret, let us forget your letter. Remember, instead, what you said to me the day I gave you the ring which I saw to-day on your trembling hand. Come with me, listen to me, for love is here, and we have but to take it into our hearts."

Margaret turned and faced him, but she did not meet his glance as she said:

"Now I know, indeed, how young you are. An older man would have reflected

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VI

THEODOR led his bride to the stern of the boat under the awning's shade. There they stood, side by side, watching their gardens and their village pass and vanish. He raised her beautiful face between his palms, and said, simply, softly, almost reverently,

"Thank you, my wife, for giving me your life and your beauty."

Margaret's eyelids dropped contentedly, but there was no answer in her mind—only a remembrance of what somewhere, sometime, she had read, as, with her eyes still closed, she murmured:

"'I am my beloved's,
And my beloved is mine:
He feedeth his flock among the lilies.'"

And then neither spoke again, for the peace of love lay in their hearts while the hour held their souls captive.

Presently Theodor spoke again:

"I wish the air were full of melody which we might breathe in with the sunshine, as if Nature were ringing out an anthem of love for your spirit and for mine."

And Margaret softly sang:

"'Là-bas, là-bas, si tu m'aimais, sur ton cheval tu me prendrais!'"

"Even better the deep and noble music of Isolde ringing from the heavens," he answered, gently.

And again they were silent, her heart full to overflowing of a happiness for

which she sought no expression: he thinking he had found what he sought in her gaze, and she feeling his kisses on her hair.

They reached the castle at nightfall, and she walked like one in slumber, conscious only of Theodor's arm, guiding her up a steep, paved path, over a bridge, into a great, dark hall.

Theodor dreamt that night that he was standing in the centre of a huge, golden flower with roots under the earth and petals reaching to the skies. He found himself involuntarily turning aside the large leaves, eagerly searching for something he had lost. The heavy perfume emanating from the pores suffocated him. On he pushed, through the forest of golden leaves, and each petal was like the one he had passed; and the longer he searched the more pow-

erful grew the perfume. At last he reached the edge of the flower. The whole world lay beneath him. He could not see distinctly at first, because the shadow of the leaves lay across the earth, between him and the sunlight, while the scent of the flower seemed to cloud the landscape as in a mist.

The more intently he gazed the more distinct grew each mountain, each river; and the outline of the cities lay sharply defined against the horizon.

"There! and there! and there!" his soul cried out, for what he had vainly sought in the beauty of the flower he saw shimmering on the plains, glistening upon the rivers, shining from the mountains.

No longer was he standing above on the edge of the flower. The breezes had cleared away the scented mists. In the midst of

the human struggle the magic spell of his enchantment was forgotten.

But when he awoke the flower lay in his arms and his eyes were blinded by its beauty.

So Theodor lived in his dream, a willing prisoner of love.

The days accumulated into weeks and months; the land of pleasure encompassed those two, and neither thought of looking to the morrow.

In the course of time a boy and a girl were born to them, but Margaret pushed them away from her, fearful lest their little hands should touch and awaken her husband's heart, whose strength frightened her. She knew the hour must come when Love could no longer rock Ambition to sleep. Every serious thought was eliminated from their life. For

three years one quality of happiness was theirs.

But unbidden guests crept in and sat at their feast. Understanding yielded her place to her enemy, Doubt, while Love grew pale in the withering presence of Satiety; Passion was no longer restrained by Intellect, and the final hour of the dream was tolled by Destiny.

Then Margaret walked with Sorrow, for Theodor's soul stirred and awoke in judgment. Endless, lonely days dragged by, and weary nights found their spirits wandering far into widely different worlds.

SOMETHING jarred during their drive one afternoon, and as they reached the house each felt relief. Not once while they were passing along the river and through the woods and under the wind-blown clouds had they seen the beauty of the ever-changing landscape or felt the magic of the sky in unison.

Theodor had spoken of what he saw in it all, of what it meant to him, gently at first, and then more and more powerfully, for his imagination was aroused by the grandeur of the scene. He seemed to become part of it, to be absorbed into it,

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Then he paused for her answer.

And the answer did not come. Margaret was bewildered, overwhelmed by the torrent of his word-pictures of what she could not understand.

She tried to comprehend, but she could not; so, as her eyes met the expectant, eager look in his, she turned her head away and said no word. Neither did Theodor. The fire faded from his eyes, the vision vanished from his imagination, the heavy hand of Fate seemed to press the joy from his heart.

When Margaret turned away her head he knew he was alone.

They were a long way from home, and during that endless hour Theodor fought his first disappointment in the agony of shaken faith in her to whom he had given his love. He could not bear to face

the truth that he had clothed Margaret's nature in a robe in which he had set all the jewels he yearned for, and that when he touched the garment to raise it to his lips—there was no texture in his hands.

The woman by his side was full of sadness, too. She was keen to know her silence had annoyed him, but why it should have grieved him was beyond her understanding.

She wondered whether her hair lay in the folds he liked, and, raising her veil, looked at herself critically in the mirror of her *châtelaine*. Then she took out her watch to see how long they had been driving. The fact that she must sit still grew irksome to her. His silence first irritated then mortified her. She wanted to cry out, to scream at this quiet man sitting in the carriage.

At last the house was reached, and she rushed to her room, locked the door, and threw herself upon the rug in front of the fire, sobbing out her wounded vanity and loneliness in a frenzy of self-commiseration. Presently the sobs subsided and the tears came less rebelliously, but even their gentleness could not clear away the mist enveloping her brain.

She raised her head and looked at the burning logs. The flames seemed to distort themselves into jeering, living, talking thoughts. Margaret felt like one contemplating the panorama of her own life. One imp pointed with sneering finger to the picture of her married life she had painted for herself on her wedding-day, and compared it with the duller, darker likeness of what it had proved to be. A deriding vixen, which she dimly recognized

to be her conscience, began to turn backward the leaves of a book, recording her life with Theodor. There was no writing on the pages, only her own face over and over. The vixen grinned and turned the leaves the other way, and, even looking into the future, Margaret could detect nothing but her own countenance imprinted upon page after page.

She closed her eyes to shut out the vision, but the fire was burning within her head, and the vixen was her own soul pointing its long, thin, jibing fingers at her heart.

The room had become dark; the fire was nearly extinguished.

Margaret got up from the rug, turning towards the door which opened on the balcony. She saw the stars shining in the sky. She remembered how in her childhood

her old nurse had told her of the cold, little, silver fairies who dwelt in the stars and were sometimes moved to send their soothing rays upon the fever-tossed and suffering who pray to them for aid.

She walked out on the balcony and looked up into the unfathomable depths of that ungirdled universe which she could not comprehend.

She half believed there was a God up there, somewhere among those stars. She prayed to Him with all her strength for happiness. But there was no God in the firmament to answer her. The night frightened and awed her poor little soul, and she turned back into her room.

The darkness seemed to have filled the corners with strange shadows, and Margaret was afraid to be alone with them. She went to the door which separated her room

from Theodor's and laid her hand on the handle. Even if she was apart from his soul, she wanted the companionship of his being. She pushed the door open and entered the adjoining room. The lamps were not lit, and Margaret could distinguish little in the sombreness. She felt Theodor's presence, as she always did; then she saw him leaning against the window. The river flowed silently beneath it. He was watching the lights on the boats drifting slowly by. They loomed out of the darkness and passed on into the darkness; and Theodor seemed as one who saw them as souls, endlessly coming, endlessly going, giving nothing, taking little besides the privilege of sailing over the dark waters of the River of Life.

He heard Margaret's step and turned towards her. She crossed the room to him

with outstretched hands and hungry eyes. She did not see the river nor the lights; she saw only her husband's eyes and his firm, red lips. She locked her arms around his neck, closing her warm, young mouth on his; and for that moment he and she were one.

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thought he was doing the model lying on the dais. Perhaps the eyes were hers, but surely this crimson mouth was the one he had kissed in his room the night before.

More and more he painted what was in his mind, less and less what he saw before him. The recollection of her virile beauty mastered his brush, glowed in his colors —those colors which mirrored the rarest secrets of creation as they touched his spirit.

The clock chiming twelve recalled him to reality. Suddenly he saw what he had painted and drew back in horror from his wife's face smiling voluptuously out of the dusk. He had imprinted in that face the love he had known. He turned from the easel. Margaret, who had entered noiselessly, stood behind him. Serenely she looked from the picture to her husband

and smilingly asked him to come down with her to the garden.

"What a beautiful woman, Theodor—so full of the joy of living!" she went on, in her even voice. "I wish you would give this painting to me; it is beautiful."

He passed the remainder of the day trying to show her the road along which he longed to walk with her. But she was not assimilative enough to ape understanding; so the day left no imprint.

The weeks which followed accentuated the difference between them. Unconsciously they drifted farther and farther away from each other. The parallel lines of their daily lives stretched across the summer months, separated by what was to him a sheet of glass, to her an opaque wall. The fall days came, carrying the beauty of the autumn glory down the hill-sides

and over the fields, that beauty of decay which holds the promise of another birth.

In these months he realized that whatever he accomplished must be from the strength of the gift within him, for the sake of what it might bring to some of those struggling in the darkness.

He knew he possessed the power to touch and awaken those emotions of the human heart whose energy results in honesty to one's self and in seeing the simplicity of the truth of the universe. He never felt, even when the creations of his imagination were clear and strong enough to have been inspired by the very breath of his soul, that they were emanations from his self.

An inheritance he held from an unknown source—an indefinable impetus—compelled him to expression; and even as his art grew to be a flexible means in his hand, he was

conscious of an obedience to some great natural law for which he found no explanation.

Hour upon hour he spent in the woods, interpreting the forest as no man may have done before. Was not the meaning simple as he read it in every stately oak, in all the tiny flowers?

Other and many hours he spent in the school, working with and for the children, continually planning new ways and better means to show them how to grow into useful men and women. Much trouble he had and little compensation, but his indomitable will compelled accomplishment to reward his toil.

As the winds grew colder and shook the leaves from tree and shrub alike, and the snow covered the earth, transforming the branches into icy sentinels to wait and

watch for the spring season, Theodor lived his time at home in his studio in the tower.

The valley and the distant hills lay shimmering far beneath him, and from his height he felt as though he were alone with the snow-flakes and the clouds. Incessantly the life within him grew more vigorous, and continually he walked in the kingdom of his imagination, in the commonwealth of childhood.

Often he waited and looked for Margaret to come to him. Sometimes he went to her, seeking the something for which he hungered, the something he had worshipped during the three years of his youth. The gift was a part of his heart, and he could not take it from her again.

One afternoon, late in the autumn, Theodor knocked at her door. He had spent a long, wearisome, unsatisfactory

day at the school, smoothing out troubles, overcoming obstacles. As he was leaving the building, tired, discouraged, doubtful of the ultimate success of his enterprise, the head matron had stopped him, saying:

"That woman died last night. The children have not been allowed to go home since the diphtheria developed, so they do not even know how ill she was. They must be told of the death. What shall I do?"

It had flashed through Theodor's brain that here was a chance to appeal to Margaret, to bring her interest into this work, so he had answered: "I shall be back in a couple of hours, and then it will be time enough to tell the children." He had walked home full of hope that he had found an opportunity to open Margaret's heart to the pulse of human sorrow throbbing outside her gate.

By the time he had entered the house and reached the door he was confident that now was ringing the hour of his compensation.

Twice he knocked before there was an answer. Then he opened the door.

The air was oppressive with the perfume of the cigarette Margaret held in her hand. She was lying on a sofa, indolent in the luxury about her, apparently indifferent to Theodor's entrance. He crossed the room to where she was and began, abruptly:

"Margaret, I want you to help me in something. Will you come with me, now, down to the school? There are two children there in the shadow of a great loss. A poor woman died last night leaving her brother and her little daughter alone in the world. There is no one to break the news to them. I want you to do it. Will you come?"

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which uses your days, and your school, which absorbs your money, and it never occurs to you to come and sit by me unless you have some hallucination by which you expect me to be carried away.

"Certainly I am not going to move from this room to wander about in the cold on such a quixotic errand. You have matrons and teachers in your school whom you pay to look after those children. Why can't you let them attend to the little wretches?"

"But, dear Margaret," Theodor urged, "it would be easier for them to bear their grief if you would break it to them gently, tenderly, as only a mother can, telling it to them in the words you would have a trusted friend use to your own babies if they were left orphans."

"My own babies! Why, I never can talk

to them—they are so stupid! You really are mad to ask me to go and talk to a couple of strange children whom I have never laid my eyes upon," she answered.

"Margaret," Theodor pleaded, "I beg you to come. They need your sympathy; I want your help. I want you to work with me as you once said you would. There is yet time. We are both young enough to bridge the separation I feel widening between us. Give up some of the treasure which you hide within your heart to those who are hungry for it. Give me a little of the love which must be hidden somewhere."

He took her hand and kissed it. As he held it he saw the ring he had given her was no longer on her finger. He turned away, his heart chilled, his brow hard.

Margaret, who was watching him under her long lashes, said, very softly:

"Be satisfied with what I have to give. Stay here by me and rest. You look so sad and tired. Let me kiss away the lines and the hardness. Love me my way for a little while."

"No," said Theodor, "I cannot stay. If you will not come with me, if this last appeal is vain, I shall have to go alone. Will you come?" He paused. "No? Then good-night."

And without looking at her again he left the room.

For the first time he was consciously facing a change in his wife which he had begun to feel months ago. Was this hard woman the Margaret he had loved? Had he unwittingly sown the seed which had brought forth this strange fruition? Or was all the love, as well as her other qualities, but a reflection of what lay in his own

heart, of what he wanted to see in her? Yet even in his loneliness he had yearned for her, thought of her, and sought her as he had this afternoon. Always he had felt for her in every thought, in every deed.

Slowly Theodor walked out of his house and down the great avenue. The winter twilight had vanished into the starry night. He threw back his head, breathing in the cold, crisp air, and looking into the heart of the heavens. The peace from its depths entered his soul, and his troubles seemed too small, too personal, to withstand the presence of the night.

He reached the gate and started along the road leading to the house in which was this hour's work.

His brain was full of this mother who was dead and whom he had never seen. He remembered the day when an intelligent-

looking boy of some fifteen years had been one of the first applicants at the school. The lad had asked for admission and Theodor had granted it without investigation, trusting the honest eyes and straightforward manner. The boy's success had been one of his rewards. About a month before he had asked to bring his sister's baby girl into the infant class, evidently shy of any explanation. And Theodor had complied. Except that the children sometimes went home to a house on the outskirts of the village, Theodor knew nothing.

The road lay through the main street, and as he passed the houses he smiled to see that in the homes of the more prosperous the shades were drawn, concealing what lived within, while the windows of the more humble left their lives unshielded from the glance of those who passed. And Theodor

thought these were perhaps the happier: the man and wife sharing their children, their toil, their fireside, working separately during the day, but equally weary and ready to enjoy their night-rest.

Presently he stood in front of the house he sought. There was no light in the windows, so he softly pushed open the door and entered the dwelling. A dimly burning lamp in the one adjoining room cast a faint, yellow shadow across the floor. Theodor went towards it, but paused upon the threshold. He saw first the outline of the silent form lying on the bed, and then he recognized Theodora sitting at the bedside.

The son looked from his mother to the dead face on the pillow, the beauty of which was marred by the seal of poverty. It was not a peaceful face. There was too

much sadness on the brow. Theodor grew sick at heart, for he had seen this woman before she had begun her struggle. It was the girl he had watched on the boat on that morning when he had met Margaret by the river.

Theodora raised her hand. "This is my share," she said, softly.

Quietly he left the house, measuring within his heart the portions of these three women, and the difference appalled him.

On he walked to the school, thinking that what is is always sadder than what might have been.

At last he saw the red-brick building before him. He was physically exhausted from his long day, but his brain was afire with the energy of the man who knows he must accomplish something which will dull the ache in his heart.

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He held the boy's hand firmly in his own; his voice was full of tenderness and sympathy.

"You know your sister has been ill," he went on, slowly, for the boy turned white, though not a muscle of his face moved, and his body did not flinch.

"She died last night," Theodor said, almost in a whisper; there was a sob in his voice. Not a sound came from the boy. He straightened his back, took a long breath, and stared out of the window into the blackness beyond.

"Of course, you and the little girl will live and work here until you can make your own way. You have your chance, and the responsibility of her care must help you to make the most of it. And feel that I am your friend, my boy, and that you will always find me ready to do what is in my

power to divide your burden with you." Theodor's voice was steady again and he spoke quietly.

"Was there suffering? Was she alone?" The boy spoke for the first time.

"She was not alone; my mother was with her," Theodor answered.

"Oh! If you only knew what my sister has had to bear! She never had half a chance." And then the old story of sin and shame and sorrow was poured forth from the mouth of this child.

Later in the night, as he drove to his own home, Theodor's heart was full of pity, and there was no room for his own sorrow.

IX

SO, vainly, Theodor sought to crush the difference between them by training Margaret's interest to need a wider scope. She would not open her heart to him, fearing to expose the little quantity of feeling and the great amount of sentimentality it contained. She was afraid of his presence, because his honesty towards her made her dread the insight of his straight, clear gaze.

Her days at first were full of bitter, angry disappointment. Continually she blamed him for not being satisfied with what she had to give him.

After all, they had dreamed together for

a little while. Why could he not refrain from awakening her. All she wanted was to be caressed and loved. She was a little of the gypsy, too, in her utter disregard of obstacles in securing what she coveted.

She sought her children in their nursery, but they were strangers to her and stopped their play and looked at her and her fine clothes in silent awe.

So long as she was humiliated, angry, hurt at him for not understanding and for not being content, her days passed quickly enough. But very soon the tempers and the tears and the uselessness of her unhappiness stamped upon and killed the love for him which gave them birth.

Margaret held no vigil over the dead love, but buried it hastily, completely, and let even the memory of its existence fade from her heart.

She sank into the lethargy of indifference, of utter *ennui*, from which she roused herself to read occasionally and follow the stories the French tell so well of those who live and sin under that terrible curse, *désœuvrement*, which has dragged so many women into active wrong.

So Margaret and Theodor walked upon the road of loneliness.

During the hours he spent in the tower he felt the voice within him struggling, questioning, conquering, until its gospel was there upon the canvas before him, and each picture bore the mark of the strange travail which gave it life.

In his loneliness he heard other voices, in which there was another message, the ever-living re-creation of the child, which carries the promise of the budding springtide. The voices of his children penetrated

his heart one afternoon as the boy and the girl found their way to his tower-room and stood upon the threshold.

When they realized that they were in an unknown part of the house, and face to face with father—the gentle, big man who sometimes kissed them early in the morning before they were out of their cribs—they were frightened by their own inquisitive audacity, and the little girl began to cry.

Theodor dropped his brushes and his palette and stared at the two little white-robed figures in the doorway quite as shyly as they gazed at him.

There they stood, these two intruders, the little boy wiping his sister's eyes with the edge of her frock and patting her protectively.

Theodor crossed the room, and, taking each child by the hand, led them over to a

high settle by the window, and, lifting them upon it, sat them side by side, saying:

"I am very glad to see you both. This is your first visit to my workshop, and I am pleased that you should find your way here. Now baby's eyes are dry and she looks more happy, you must stay a while and talk to me while I work."

The girl had quite regained her complacency and began to take off her shoes and stockings; the boy seemed to realize the responsibility of being talked to like a grown-up, and spoke with labored distinctness as he asked:

"Father, why do you work so far away all the time?"

"To show the little I know to some of those who feel," Theodor answered.

"But, father, shall sister and me work?" the boy asked.

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live to the limit of their individual life-spark, and then fade away or sleep away."

Solemnly the little boy asked:

"Shall grandmother and you die?"

"Yes—some day."

"Shall sister and me die?"

"Yes—in time."

"Well"—with a puzzled frown—"who'll live here after we are all dead?"

"Your children—presumably."

This was too much for the little girl.

"What!" she exclaimed, "my chiller—my bad chiller, those naughty Pollies, they here!" and her voice rose to a despairing shriek.

Very sternly and with a reproving voice the little boy said to her, as he stroked her plump, round hand:

"To-morrow morning we'll bring your

family up here to father, and he can explain to them, too.

"We'd better go now; it's time to go down to grandmother's room."

"Sisser want father to come, too," and the child climbed down from the settle and ran to Theodor and took his nervously made hand in her little soft ones.

He lifted her to his shoulder, and, leading the boy by the hand, left the studio and went down the stair and through the halls to Theodora's door.

The boy knocked. A gentle voice said "Come in," and he pushed open the door and announced, in his slow, distinct enunciation:

"Grandmother, we've brought father, so you could explain to him, your way, about the rose-bush dying."

TIME is forever going on while some of his human progeny fall behind, crushed by their burden, and, pausing on their way, stumble and fall and are annihilated in oblivion; the others, ever straining forward, struggling into the future, abreast with their uncompromising father, striving for and grasping, until their dying breath, their portion of fate.

Theodor was not of those who falter, question, and stand still upon the train of Time, for he made Opportunity his helpmate and Endeavor his companion. His fame spread over his country into other

lands, and he reaped a harvest of good-will and appreciation.

Sometimes—at rare intervals—when he and Margaret were alone together he was conscious of a new and subtle change in her attitude towards him. He was aware that she shrank from the pressure of his hand and the touch of his lips. A transformation drew her altogether away from him, leaving only a remembrance of his short hour in the garden of Eden when he and she were looking into each other's eyes.

Into this memory he grafted the best of his daily thoughts, eliminating each disillusion, until he took back his own again by restoring the original of his dream-love to the empty shrine.

As he once loved the wife, he became the mother to his children. They were the pivot of his life, and their young and pure and

tender feelings brought the truest joy into his heart, the love which is the only unselfish one in the legion which grows in all sorts and kinds of men and women.

Their tiny, dimpled hands sought and found their way to the innermost storehouse of his nature; for their pleasure he used his imagination to the limit of its stories; for their example he took even the smallest part of his work and did it.

Many hours those three lived together, and as the children grew into his life and closer to his heart, Theodor found his reward sweet beyond all dreams. So the seasons budded, bloomed, and faded, bringing ever nearer the great day when the son and daughter should stand upon the threshold of their own life, entering their kingdom with their hands in his and their eyes seeing even farther.

In these days he no longer attempted to penetrate beyond Margaret's smile. Often he marvelled at her glowing beauty, and passed on, relieved to see that she seemed to be content with her own way of life.

One morning Theodor was standing on a crowded corner of one of the streets of the neighboring city. His face was contracted by the force of his inward activity. Suddenly an impulse prompted him to look at and into the rushing, pushing, passing human stream. Margaret was walking towards him in the crowd. She did not see him as she came along with shining eyes and brilliant cheeks. A radiant symbol, full of aggressive loveliness, she passed and vanished like a stranger into the living sea of faces.

"Is there a man upon this earth," murmured Theodor to himself, "who could

have awakened Margaret? Has she anything behind her beauty which might vibrate into a *living love?*"

In the flash of the thought his spirit writhed with an agony of yearning for the quality of love he had vainly sought. His soul rebelled against the disappointment of his destiny, for he knew his manner of living was not according to the wish of his heart. For the first time he paused; and he doubted himself. Then the moment was dead and the bitterness of his anguish with it.

"Am I not," he wondered, "like the child in the nursery tale whom the Snow Queen hid in her mantle and carried away to the Land of Ice, embracing the child in her flight? The first kiss chilled his heart; the second one caused his soul to tremble. So the cold Snow Lady mur-

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He heard the sound of Margaret's voice coming through the open drawing-room window. It jarred his mood, driving the deep enjoyment from his spirit.

Unconsciously his brain absorbed the words his wife was speaking.

"My love, my dearest love!" her voice was pleading, "I cannot bear the deception any longer. I cannot lie again. It is not because of Theodor. He would not give me what I wanted, and I had the right to seek and expect happiness. But my baby girl is growing into womanhood, and even though she is a stranger to me, I come home from our hour with the memory of your kisses still burning on my mouth, glowing in my heart, stamped upon my brow for those who know our sort of love, and I dare not come under the same roof with her innocence. I cannot learn my

duty towards her with your arms around me; so let us part before it is too late and while the something which compels me to break with you has the power to withstand my inclination."

Theodor stood immovable, paralyzed, his thoughts whirling wildly through his brain, compelling him to understand this revelation with so much force that he could not stir while Margaret was speaking.

Then mad, blinded with rage, murder in his heart, he threw the window open and burst into the room.

He stood before them for an instant, awful in his anger. He raised his hand to strike down the thief before him, but his hand remained uplifted, for the sound of his children's voices coming from without penetrated the barrier of his hate.

His arm dropped to his side. A sigh of unutterable grief came from the depths of his very self as the shadow of his love faded from its sanctuary and the altar crumbled within his heart.

He turned his eyes from the guilt before him and looked out of the farther window and saw the boy and girl sitting by his mother's chair under the old oak-tree—a peaceful, gentle picture of innocent contentment.

With all his strength, Theodor took his courage into his seething spirit and spoke to the man cringing before him:

"Go; leave this woman forever. Live your own life. Die your own death, for you carry the curse of your theft in your breast. Go," and he raised his hand.

The man walked out of the room, across the lawn, down the avenue.

The awful silence of Fate's presence filled the room.

Theodor stood as though turned to stone until the man disappeared in the distance.

Then he looked at Margaret.

He took her hand in his and led her to the window. They paused upon the sill, and Theodor saw the faces smiling to him out of the dusk. Almost in a whisper he murmured:

"Come, my wife—come with me to our children and to my mother."

They stepped out upon the lawn and went towards Theodora. The mother looked into her son's eyes and read his victory there. He knelt down beside her chair and laid his head against her breast. Theodora folded her arms around him as if he were a child.

Her eyes closed and she thought she was standing at the end of a long, hard road. And, behold! she was upon the summit of the mountain. Her soul and her son's soul met, and his voice, which sounded strangely like a dearly beloved voice silenced long ago, murmured, tenderly, "There is no retribution, for I am the Compensation."

And in this supreme moment of victory Theodora's spirit passed on beyond this world, and Theodor held his mother's lifeless form against his heart.

THE END