

## Three Stories

By V., O., C.S.

### I—Honi soit qui mal y pense

By C. S.

“**B**UT I’m not very tall, am I?” said the little book-keeper, coming close to the counter so as to prevent me from seeing that she was standing on tiptoe.

“A *p’tite* woman,” said I, “goes straight to my heart.”

The book-keeper blushed and looked down, and began fingering a bunch of keys with one hand.

“How is the cold?” I asked. “You don’t seem to cough so much to-day.”

“It always gets bad again at night,” she answered, still looking down and playing with her keys.

I reached over to them, and she moved her hand quickly away and clasped it tightly with the other.

I picked up the keys:—“Store-room, Cellar, Commercial Room, Office,” said I, reading off the names on the labels—“why, you seem to keep not only the books, but everything else as well.”

She turned away to measure out some whisky at the other  
window

window, and then came back and held out her hand for the keys.

“What a pretty ring,” I said; “I wonder I haven’t notice d it before. You can’t have had it on lately.”

She looked at me fearfully and again covered her hand.

‘Please give me my keys.’

“Yes, if I may look at the ring.”

The little book-keeper turned away, and slipping quietly on to her chair, burst into tears.

I pushed open the door of the office and walked in.

“What is it?” I whispered, bending over her and gently smoothing her hair.

“I—I hate him!” she sobbed.

“Him?—Him?”

“Yes,—the—the ring man.”

I felt for the little hand among the folds or the inky table-cloth, and stooped and kissed her forehead. “Forgive me, dearest——”

“Go away,” she sobbed, “go away. I wish I had never seen you. It was all my fault: I left off wearing the ring on purpose, but he’s coming here to-day——and——and we are so many at home——and have so little money——”

And as I went upstairs to pack I could see the little brown head bent low over the inky table-cloth.

## II—A Purple Patch

By O.

## I

IT was nearly half-past four. Janet was sitting in the drawing-room reading a novel and waiting for tea. She was in one of those pleasing moods when the ordinary happy circumstances of life do not pass unnoticed as inevitable. She was pleased to be living at home with her father and sister, pleased that her father was a flourishing doctor, and that she could sit idle in the drawing-room, pleased at the pretty furniture, at the flowers which she had bought in the morning.

She seldom felt so. Generally these things did not enter her head as a joy in themselves; and this mood never came upon her when, according to elderly advice, it would have been useful. In no trouble, great or small, could she gain comfort from remembering that she lived comfortably; but sometimes without any reason, as now, she felt glad at her position.

When the parlour-maid came in and brought the lamp, Janet watched her movements pleasurably. She noticed all the ways of a maid in an orderly house: how she placed the lighted lamp on the table at her side, then went to the windows and let down the blinds and drew the curtains, then pulled a small table forward, spread a blue-edged cloth on it, and walked out quietly, pushing her cuffs up a little.

She was pleased too with her novel, Miss Braddon's *Asphodel*. For some time she had enjoyed reading superior books. She knew that *Asphodel* was bad, and saw its inferiority to the books which she

she had lately read ; but that did not prevent her pleasure at being back with Miss Braddon.

The maid came in and set the glass-tray on the table which she had just covered, took a box of matches from her apron pocket, lit the wick of the silver spirit-stove and left the room. Janet watched the whole proceeding with pleasure, sitting still in the arm-chair. Three soft raps on the gong and Gertrude appeared. She made the tea, and they talked. When they had finished, Gertrude sat at her desk and began to write a letter, and still talking, Janet gradually let herself into her novel once more. There was plenty of the story left, she would read right on till dinner.

They had finished talking for some minutes when they heard a ring.

"Oh, Gerty, suppose this is a visitor !" Janet said, looking up from her book.

Gertrude listened. Janet prayed all the time that it might not be a visitor, and she gave a low groan as she heard heavy steps upon the stairs. Gertrude's desk was just opposite the door, and directly the maid opened it she saw that the visitor was an awkward young man who never had anything to say. She exchanged a glance with Janet, then Janet saw the maid who announced, "Mr. Huddleston."

And then she saw Mr. Huddleston. She laid her book down open on the table behind her, and rose to shake hands with him.

Janet had one conversation with Mr. Huddleston—music : they were very slightly acquainted, and they never got beyond that subject. She smiled at the inevitableness of her question as she asked :

"Were you at the Saturday Afternoon Concert ?"

When they had talked for ten minutes with some difficulty, Gertrude, who had finished her letter, left the room : she was

engaged to be married, and was therefore free to do anything she liked. After a visit of half an hour Huddleston went.

Janet rang the bell, and felt a little guilty as she took up the open book directly her visitor had gone. She did not know quite why, but she was dissatisfied. However, in a moment or two she was deep in the excitement of *Asphodel*.

She read on for a couple of hours, and then she heard the carriage drive up to the door. She heard her father come into the house and go to his consulting-room, then walk upstairs to his bedroom, and she knew that in a few minutes he would be down in the drawing-room to talk for a quarter of an hour before dinner. When she heard him on the landing, she put away her book ; Gertrude met him just at the door ; they both came in together, and then they all three chatted. But instead of feeling in a contented mood, because she had read comfortably, as she had intended all the afternoon, Janet was dissatisfied, as if the afternoon had slipped by without being enjoyed, wasted over the exciting novel.

And towards the end of dinner her thoughts fell back on an old trouble which had been dully threatening her. Gertrude was her father's favourite ; gay and pretty, she had never been difficult. Janet was more silent, could not amuse her father and make him laugh, and he was not fond of her. She would find still more difficulty when Gertrude was married, and she was left alone with him. His health was failing, and he was growing very cantankerous. She dreaded the prospect, and already the doctor was moaning to Gerty about her leaving, and she was making him laugh for the last time over the very cause of his dejection. Not that he would have retarded her marriage by a day ; he was extremely proud of her engagement to the son of the great Lady Beamish.

That

That thought had been an undercurrent of trouble ever since Gertrude's engagement, and she wondered how she could have forgotten it for a whole afternoon. Now she was as fully miserable as she had been content four hours before, and her trouble at the moment mingled with her unsatisfactory recollection of the afternoon, her annoyance at Mr. Huddleston's interruption, and the novel which she had taken up directly he had left the room.

## II

A year after Gertrude's marriage Dr. Worgan gave up his work and decided at last to carry out a cherished plan. One of his oldest friends was going to Algiers with his wife and daughter. The doctor was a great favourite with them; he decided to sell his house in London, and join the party in their travels. The project had been discussed for a long time, and Janet foresaw an opportunity of going her own way. She was sure that her father did not want her. She had hinted at her wish to stay in England and work for herself; but she did not insist or trouble her father, and as he did not oppose her she imagined that the affair was understood. When the time for his departure drew close, Janet said something about her arrangements which raised a long discussion. Dr. Worgan expressed great astonishment at her resolution, and declared that she had not been open with him. Janet could not understand his sudden opposition; perhaps she had not been explicit enough; but surely they both knew what they were about, and it was obviously better that they should part.

They were in the drawing-room. Dr. Worgan felt aggrieved that the affair should be taken so completely out of his hands; he had been reproaching her, and arguing for some time. Janet's  
tone

tone vexed him. She was calm, disinclined to argue, behaving as if the arrangement were quite decided : he would have been better pleased if she had cried or lost her temper.

“It’s very easy to say that ; but, after all, you’re not independent. You say you want to get work as a governess ; but that’s only an excuse for not going away with me.”

“You never let me do anything for you.”

“I don’t ask you to. I never demand anything of you. I’m not a tyrant ; but that’s no reason why you should want to desert me ; you’re the last person I have.”

Janet hated arguments and talk about affairs which were obviously settled. They had talked for almost an hour, they could neither of them gain anything from the conversation, and yet her father seemed to delight in prolonging it. She did not wish to defend her course. She would willingly have allowed her father to put her in the wrong, if only he had left her alone to do what both of them wanted.

“You want to pose as a kind of martyr, I suppose. Your father hasn’t treated you well, he only loved your sister ; you’ve a grievance against him.”

“No, indeed ; you know it’s not so.”

The impossibility of answering such charges, all the unnecessary fatigue, had brought her very near crying : she felt the lump in her throat, the aching in her breast. Be a governess ? Why, she would willingly be a factory girl, working her life out for a few shillings a week, if only she could be left alone to be straightforward. The picture of the girls with shawl and basket leaving the factory came before her eyes. She really envied them, and pictured herself walking home to her lonely garret, forgotten and in peace.

“But that’s how our relations and friends will look upon your conduct.”

“Oh

"Oh no," she answered, trying to smile and say something amusing after the manner of Gertrude; "they will only shake their heads at their daughters and say, 'There goes another rebel who isn't content to be beautiful, innocent, and protected.'"

But Janet's attempts to be amusing were not successful with her father.

"They won't at all. They'll say, 'At any rate her father is well off enough to give her enough to live upon, and not make her work as a governess.'"

"*We* know that's got nothing to do with it. If I were dependent, I should feel I'd less right to choose——"

"But you're mistaken; that's not honesty, but egoism, on your part."

Janet had nothing to answer; there was a pause, as if her father wished her to argue the point. She thought, perhaps, she had better say something, else she would show too plainly that she saw he was in the wrong; but she said nothing, and he went on: "And what will people say at the idea of you're being a governess? Practically a servant in a stranger's house, with a pretence of equality, but less pay than a good cook. What will all our friends say?"

Janet did not wish to say to herself in so many words that her father was a snob. If he had left her alone, she would have been satisfied with the unacknowledged feeling that he attached importance to certain things.

"Surely people of understanding know there's no harm in being a governess, and I'm quite willing to be ignored by any one who can't see that."

These were the first words she spoke with any warmth.

"Selfishness again. It's not only your concern: what will your sister think and feel about it?"

"Gerty

"Gerty is sensible enough to think as I do ; besides, she is very happy, and so has no right to dictate to other people about their affairs ; indeed, she won't trouble about it—why should she ? I'm not part of her."

"You're unjust to Gertrude : your sister is too sweet and modest to wish to dictate to any one."

"Exactly." Janet could not help saying this one word, and yet she knew that it would irritate her father still more.

"And who would take you as a governess ? You don't find it easy to live even with your own people, and I don't know what you can teach. Perhaps you will reproach me as Laura did her mother, and say it was my fault you didn't go to Girton ?"

"Oh, I think I can manage. My music is not much, I know ; but I think it's good enough to be useful."

"Are you going to say that I was wrong in not encouraging you to train for a professional musician ?"

"I hadn't the faintest notion of reproaching you for anything : it was only modesty."

She knew that having passed the period when she might have cried, she was being fatigued into the flippant stage, and her father hated that above everything.

"Now you're beginning to sneer in your superior way," Dr. Worgan said, walking up the room, "talking to me as if I were an idiot——"

He was interrupted by the maid who came in to ask Janet whether she could put out the light in the hall. Janet looked questioningly at her father, who had faced round when he heard the door open, and he said yes.

"And, Callant," Janet cried after her, and then went on in a lower tone as she reappeared, "we shall want breakfast at eight to-morrow ; Dr. Worgan is going out early."

The

The door was shut once more. Her father seemed vexed at the interruption so welcome to her.

“Well, I never could persuade you in anything; but I resent the way in which you look on my advice as if it were selfish—I’m only anxious for your own welfare.”

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In bed Janet lay awake thinking over the conversation. She had an instinctive dislike to judging any one, especially her father. Why couldn’t people who understood each other remain satisfied with their tacit understanding, and each go his own way without pretence? She was sure her father did not really want her, he was only opposing her desertion to justify himself in his own eyes, trying to persuade himself that he did love her. If he had just let things take their natural course and made no objections against his better judgment, she would not have criticised him; she had never felt aggrieved at his preference for Gertrude: it so happened that she was not sympathetic to him, and they both knew it. Over and over again as she lay in bed, she argued out all these points with herself. If he had said, “You’re a good girl, you’re doing the right thing; I admire you, though we’re not sympathetic,” his humanity would have given her deep pleasure, and they might have felt more loving towards each other than ever before. Perhaps that was too much to expect; but at any rate he might have left her alone. Anything rather than all this pretence, which forced her to criticise him and defend herself.

But perhaps she had not given him a chance? She knew that every movement and look of hers irritated him: if only she could have not been herself, he might have been generous. But then, as if to make up for this thought, she said aloud to herself:

“Generosity, logic, and an objection to unnecessary talking  
are

are manly qualities." And then she repented for becoming bitter.

"But why must all the hateful things in life be defined and printed on one's mind in so many words? I could face difficulties quite well without being forced to set all the unpleasantnesses in life clearly out. And this makes me bitter."

She was terribly afraid of becoming bitter. Bitterness was for the failures, and why should she own to being a failure; surely she was not aiming very high? She was oppressed by the horrible fear of becoming old-maidish and narrow. Perhaps she would change gradually without being able to prevent, without even noticing the change. Every now and then she spoke her thoughts aloud.

"I can't have taking ways: some people think I'm superior and crushing, father says I'm selfish;" and yet she could not think of any great pleasures which she had longed for and claimed. Gerty had never hidden her wishes or sacrificed anything to others, and she always got everything she fancied; yet she was not selfish.

Then the old utter dejection came over her as she thought of her life; if no one should love her, and she should grow old and fixed in desolation? This was no sorrow at an unfortunate circumstance, but a dejection so far-reaching that its existence seemed to her more real than her own; it must have existed in the world before she was born, it must have been since the beginning. The smaller clouds which had darkened her day were forced aside, and the whole heaven was black with this great hopelessness. If any sorrow had struck her, death, disgrace, crime, that would have been a laughing matter compared with this.

Perhaps life would be better when she was a governess; she would be doing something, moulding her own life, ill-treated with  
actual

actual wrongs perhaps. In the darkness of her heaven there came a little patch of blue sky, the hopefulness which was always there behind the cloud, and she fell asleep, dreamily looking forward to a struggle, to real life with possibilities—dim pictures.

## III

A month afterwards, on a bitterly cold February day, Janet was wandering miserably about the house. She was to start in a few days for Bristol, where she had got a place as governess to two little girls, the daughters of a widower, a house-master at the school. Her father had left the day before. Janet could not help crying as she sat desolately in her cold bedroom trying to concern herself with packing and the arrangements for her journey. She was to dine that evening with Lady Beamish, to meet Gerty and her husband and say good-bye. She did not want to go a bit, she would rather have stayed at home and been miserable by herself. She had, as usual, asked nothing of any of her friends; she felt extraordinarily alone, and she grew terrified when she asked herself what connected her with the world at all, how was she going to live and why? What hold had she on life? She might go on as a governess all her life and who would care? What reason had she to suppose that anything would justify her living? From afar the struggle had looked attractive, there was something fine and strong in it; that would be life indeed when she would have to depend entirely upon herself and work her way; but now that the time was close at hand, the struggle only looked very bitter and prosaic. In her imagination beforehand she had always looked on at herself admiringly as governess and been strengthened  
by

by the picture. Now she was acting to no gallery. Whatever strength and virtue there was in her dealing met no one's approval ; and all she had before her in the immediate future was a horrible sense of loneliness, a dreaded visit, two more days to be occupied with details of packing, a cab to the station, the dull east wind, the journey, the leave-taking all the more exquisitely painful because she felt that no one cared. The sense of being neglected gave her physical pain all over her body until her finger-tips ached. How is it possible, she thought, that a human being in the world for only a few years can be so hopeless and alone ?

In the cab on her way to Lady Beamish she began to think at once of the evening before her. She tried to comfort herself with the idea of seeing Gerty, sweet Gerty, who charmed every one, and what close friends they had been ! But the thought of Lady Beamish disturbed and frightened her. Lady Beamish was a very handsome woman of sixty, with gorgeous black hair showing no thread of white. She had been a great beauty, and a beauty about whom no one could tell any stories ; she had married a very brilliant and successful man, and seconded him most ably during his lifetime. Those who disliked her declared she was fickle, and set too much value on her social position. Janet had always fancied that she objected from the beginning to her second son's engagement to Gertrude ; but there was no understanding her, and if Janet had been asked to point to some one who was radically unsimple, she would at once have thought of Lady Beamish. She had been told of many charming things which she had done, and she had heard her say the sweetest things ; but then suddenly she was stiff and unforgiving. There was no doubt about her cleverness and insight ; many of her actions showed complete disregard of convention, and yet, whenever Janet had seen her, she had always been lifted up on a safe height by her  
own

own high birth, her dead husband's distinctions, her imposing appearance, and hedged round by all the social duties which she performed so well. Janet saw that Lady Beamish's invitation was kind ; but she was the last person with whom she would have chosen to spend that evening. But here she was at the door, there was no escape.

Lady Beamish was alone in the drawing-room. "I'm very sorry, I'm afraid I've brought you here on false pretences. I've just had a telegram from Gertrude to say that Charlie has a cold. I suppose she's afraid it may be influenza, and so she's staying at home to look after him. And Harry has gone to the play, so we shall be quite alone." Janet's heart sank. Gerty had been the one consoling circumstance about that evening ; besides, Lady Beamish would never have asked her if Gerty had not been coming. How would she manage with Lady Beamish all alone ? She made up her mind to go as soon after dinner as she could.

They talked about Gertrude ; that was a good subject for Janet, and she clung to it ; she was delighted to hear Lady Beamish praise her warmly.

As they sat down to dinner Lady Beamish said :

"You're not looking well, Janet ?"

"I'm rather tired," she answered lightly ; "I've been troubled lately, the weight of the world—— but I'm quite well."

Lady Beamish made no answer. Janet could not tell why she had felt an impulse to speak the truth, perhaps just because she was afraid of her, and gave up the task of feeling easy as hopeless. They talked of Gertrude again. Dinner was quickly finished. Instead of going back into the drawing-room, Lady Beamish took her upstairs into her own room.

"I'm sorry you have troubles which are making you thin and pale. At your age life ought to be bright and full of romance :  
you

you ought to have no troubles at all. I heard that you weren't going to travel with your father, but begin work on your own account : it seems to me you're quite right, and I admire your courage."

Janet was surprised that Lady Beamish should show so much interest.

"My courage somehow doesn't make me feel cheerful," Janet answered, laughing, "and I can't see anything hopeful in the future to look forward to——" "Why am I saying all this to her?" she wondered.

"No? And the consciousness of doing right as an upholding power—that is generally a fallacy. I think you are certainly right there."

Janet looked at Lady Beamish, astonished and comforted to hear these words from the lips of an old experienced woman.

"I *am* grateful to you for saying that?"

"It must be a hard wrench to begin a new kind of life."

"It's not the work or even the change which I mind; if only there were some assurance in life, something certain and hopeful : I feel so miserably alone, acting on my own responsibility in the only way possible, and yet for no reason——"

"My poor girl——" and she stretched out her arms. Janet rose from her chair and took both her hands and sat down on the footstool at her feet. She looked up at her handsome face; it seemed divine to her lighted by that smile, and the wrinkles infinitely touching and beautiful. There was an intimate air about the room.

"You've decided to go away to Bristol?"

"I thought I'd be thorough : I might stay in London and get work ; a friend of mine is editor of a lady's paper, and I suppose she could give me something to do ; and there are other things I could do ; but that doesn't seem to me thorough enough——"

The

The superiority of the older experienced women made the girl feel weak. She would have a joy in confessing herself.

“I suppose it was chiefly Gerty’s marriage which set me thinking I’d better change. Until then I’d lived contentedly enough. I’m easily occupied, and I felt no necessity to work. But when I was left alone with father, I began gradually to feel as if I couldn’t go on living so, as if I hadn’t the right ; nothing I ever did pleased him. And then I wondered what I was waiting for——”

She looked up at Lady Beamish and saw her fine features set attentively to her story ; she could tell everything to such a face—all these things of which she had never spoken to any one. She looked away again.

“Was I waiting to get married? That idea tortured me. Why should ideas come and trouble us when they’re untrue and bear no likeness to our character?”

She turned her head once more to glance at the face above her.

“I looked into myself. Was it true of me that my only outlook in life was a man, that *that* was the only aim of my life? It wasn’t necessary to answer the question, for it flashed into my mind with bitter truth that if I’d been playing that game, I’d been singularly unsuccessful, so I needn’t trouble about the question——”

Astonished at herself, she moved her hand up, and Lady Beamish stretched out hers, and held the girl’s hand upon her lap. Then, half ashamed of her frankness, she went on quickly and in a more ordinary tone :

“Oh, that and everything else—I was afraid of growing bitter. When my father threw up his work and decided to go to Algiers with his old friends, that seemed a good opportunity : I would do something for myself, you’re justified if you work. It seemed  
hopeful

hopeful then ; but now the prospect is as hopeless and desolate as before."

Janet saw the tears collecting in Lady Beamish's eyes, and her underlip beginning to quiver. Lady Beamish dared not kiss the girl for fear of breaking into tears : she stood up and went towards the fire, and trying to conquer her tears said : " Seeing you in trouble makes all my old wounds break out afresh."

Janet gazed in wonder at her, feeling greatly comforted. Lady Beamish put her hand on the girl's head as she sat before her and said smiling : " It's strange how one sorrow brings up another, and if you cry you can't tell for what exactly you're crying. As I hear you talk of loneliness, I'm reminded of my own loneliness, so different from yours. As long as my own great friend was living, there was no possibility of loneliness ; I was proud, I could have faced the whole world. But since he died, every year has made me feel the want of a sister or brother, some one of my own generation. I don't suppose you can understand what I mean. You say : ' You have sons, and many friends who love and respect you ' ; that's true, and, indeed, without my sons I should not live ; but they've all got past me, even Harry, the youngest. I can do nothing more for them, and as years go by I grow less able to do anything for anybody ; my energy leaves me, and I sit still and see the world in front of me, see men and women whom I admire, whose conduct I commend inwardly, but that is all. My heart aches sometimes for a companion of my own age who would sit still with me, who understands my ideas, who has no new object in view, who has done life and has been left behind too——"

" Extremes meet," she broke off. " I wish to comfort you, who are looking hopelessly forward, and all I can do is to show you an old woman's sorrow."

" But

"But wait," she went on, sitting down, "let us be practical ; you needn't go back to-night, I'll tell some one to fetch your things. And will you let me try and help you ? I don't know whether I can ; but may I try ? Won't you stay a bit here with me ? You would then have time to think over your plans ; it would do no harm, at any rate. Or, if you would prefer living alone, would you let me help you ? Sometimes it's easier to be indebted to strangers. Don't answer now, you know my offer is sincere, coming at this time ; you can think it over."

She left her place and met the servant at the door, to give her the order for the fetching of Janet's things. She came back and stood with her hands behind her, facing Janet, who looked up to her from her stool, adoring her as if she were a goddess.

"There's only one thing to do in life, to try and help those whom we can help ; but it's very difficult to help you young people," she said, drying her eyes ; "you generally want something we cannot give you."

"You comforted me more than I can say. I never dreamed of the possibility of such comfort as you're giving me."

Still standing facing Janet, she suddenly began : "I knew a girl a long time ago ; she was the most exquisite creature I've ever seen. She was lovely as only a Jewess can be lovely : by her side English beauties looked ridiculous, as if their features had been thrown together by mistake a few days ago ; this girl's beauty was eternal, I don't know how else to describe her superiority. There was a harmony about her figure—not as we have pretty figures—but every movement seemed to be the expression of a magnificent nature. She had that strange look in her face which some Jews have, a something half humorous half pitiful about the eyebrows ; it was so remarkable in a young girl, as if an endless experience of the world had been born in her—not that she was tired or *blasé* ; she

she wasn't at all one of those young people who have seen the vanity of everything, she was full of enthusiasm, fascinatingly fresh ; she was so capable and sensitive that nothing could be foreign or incomprehensible to her. I never saw any one so unerring ; I would have wagered the world that she could never be wrong in feeling. I never saw her misunderstand any one, except on purpose."

Janet was rapt in attention, loving to hear this beauty's praises in the mouth of Lady Beamish. She kept her gaze fixed on the face, which now was turned towards her, now towards the fire.

"At the time I remember some man was writing in the paper about the inferiority of women, and as a proof he said quite truly that there were no women artists except actresses. He happened to mention one or two well-known living artists whom I knew personally ; they weren't to be compared with this girl, and they would have been the first to say so themselves. She had no need to write her novels and symphonies ; she lived them. One would have said a person most wonderfully fitted for life. Oh, I could go on praising her for ever ; except once, I never fell so completely in love as I did with her. To see her dance and romp—I hadn't realised before how a great nature can show itself in everything a person does. It is a joy to think of her.

"One day she came to me, it was twenty years ago, I was a little over forty, she was just nineteen. She had fallen in love with a boy of her own age, and was in terrible difficulties with herself. I suppose it would have been more fitting if I'd given her advice ; but I was so full of pity at the sight of this exquisite nature in torments that I could only try and comfort her and tell her above all things she inusn't be oppressed by any sense of her own wickedness ;

wickedness ; we all had difficulties of the same kind, and we couldn't expect to do more than just get along somehow as well as we could. I was angry with Fate that such a harmonious being had been made to jar with so heavy a strain. She had been free, and now she was to be confounded and brought to doubt. I don't think I can express it in words ; but I feel as if I really understood why she killed herself a few days later. She had come among us, a wonder, ignoring the littlenesses of life, or else making them worthy by the spirit in which she treated them, and the first strain of this dragging ordinary affliction bewildered her. Whether a little more experience would have saved her, or whether it was a superior flash of insight which prompted her to end her life—at any rate it wasn't merely unreturned love which oppressed her.”

“And what was the man like ?”

“He was quite a boy, and never knew she was in love with him ; in fact I can't tell how far she did love him. The older I grow the more certain I feel that this actual love wasn't deep ; but it was the sudden revelation of a whole mystery, a new set of difficulties, which confounded an understanding so far-reaching and superior. I remember her room distinctly ; she was unlike most women in this respect, she had no desire to furnish her own room and be surrounded by pretty things of her own choice. She left the room just as it was when the family took the furnished house, with its very common ugly furniture, vile pictures on the walls, and things under glasses. She carried so much beauty with her, she didn't think her room worth troubling about. I always imagine that her room has never been entered or changed since her death : nothing stirs there, except in the summer a band of small flies dance their mazy quadrille at the centre of the ceiling. I remember how she used to lie on the sofa and wonder at them with her half-laughing, half-pathetic eyes.”

“And what did her people think?”

“Her family adored her: they were nice people, very ordinary——”

There was a knock at the door and Henry appeared, red-cheeked and smelling of the cold street. Janet rose from her stool to shake hands with him: his entrance was an unpleasant interruption; she thought that his mother too must feel something of the sort, although he was the one thing in the world she loved most.

“How was your play, Harry?”

“Oh, simply wonderful.”

“Was the house pretty full?”

“Not very, though people were fairly enthusiastic; but there was a fool of a girl sitting in front of us, I could have kicked her, she would go on laughing.”

“Perhaps she thought you were foolish for not laughing!”

“But such a sloppy-looking person had no right to laugh.”

“Opinions differ about personal appearance.”

“Well, at any rate she had a dirty dress on; the swan’s-down round her cloak was perfectly black.”

“Ah, now your attack becomes more telling!”

Lady Beamish had not changed her position. When Henry left, Janet feared she might want to stop their confidential talk; but she showed no signs of wishing to go to bed.

“I wish boys would remain boys, and not grow older; they never grow into such nice men, they don’t fulfil their promise.”

She sat down once more, and went on to tell Janet another story, a love story. When Janet, happy as she had not been for months, kissed her and said good-night, she told her how glad she was that no one else had been with her that evening.

Janet

Janet went to bed, feeling that the world was possible once more. Her mind was relieved of a great weight, she was wonderfully light-hearted, now that she rested weakly upon another's generosity, and was released from her egotistical hopelessness. She no longer had a great trouble which engrossed her thoughts, her mind was free to travel over the comforting circumstances of that evening: the intimate room, Lady Beamish's face with the tears gathering in her eyes, the confession she had made of her own loneliness, her offer of help which had made the world human again, her story and Henry's interruption, and the funny little argument between the mother and the son whom she adored; and after that, Lady Beamish had still stayed talking, and had dropped into telling of love as willingly as any school-girl, only everything came with such sweet force from the woman with all that experience of life. Every point in the evening with Lady Beamish had gone to give her a deep-felt happiness; hopes sprang up in her mind, and she soon fell asleep filled with wonder and pity, thinking of the lovely Jewess whom Lady Beamish had known and admired so long ago, when Janet herself was only five or six years old.

The older woman lay awake many hours thinking over her own life, and the sorrows of this poor girl.

\* \* \* \* \*

Janet did not take Lady Beamish's offer, but went to Bristol, upheld by the idea that her friend respected her all the more for keeping to her plans. The first night at Bristol, in the room which was to be hers, she took out the old letter of invitation for that evening, and before she went to bed she kissed the signature "Clara Beamish"—the christian name seemed to bring them close together.

When

When she had overcome the strangeness of her surroundings, life was once more what it had always been ; there was no particular struggle, no particular hopefulness. She was cheerful for no reason on Monday, less cheerful for no reason on Wednesday. The correspondence with Lady Beamish, which she had hoped would keep up their friendship, dropped almost immediately ; the two letters she received from her were stiff, far off. Janet heard of her now and then, generally as performing some social duty. They met too a few times, but almost as strangers.

But Janet always remembered that she had gained the commendation of the wonderful woman, and that she approved of her ; and she never forgot that evening, and the picture of Clara Beamish, exquisitely sympathetic, adorable. It stood out as a bright spot in life, nothing could change its value and reality.

### III—Sancta Maria

By V.

THE fire had grown black and smoky, and the room felt cold. It was about four o'clock on a dark day in November. Black snow-fraught clouds had covered the sky since the dawn. They seemed to be saving up their wrath for the storm to come. A woman sat close to the fire with a child in her arms. From time to time she shuddered involuntarily. It was miserably cold. In the corner of the room a man lay huddled up in a confusion of rags and covers. He moaned from time to time. Suddenly the fire leaped into a yellow flame, which lit up the room and revealed all its nakedness and filth. The floor was bare, and there

there were lumps of mud here and there on the boards, left by the tramp of heavy boots. There was a strip of paper that had come unfastened from the wall, and hung over in a large curve. It was black and foul, but here and there could be seen faintly a pattern of pink roses twined in and out of a trellis. There was no furniture in the room but the chair on which the woman sat. By the sick man's side was a white earthenware bowl, full of a mixture that gave out a strong pungent smell which pervaded the room. On the floor by the fireside was a black straw hat with a green feather and a rubbed velvet bow in it. The woman's face was white, and the small eyes were full of an intense despair. As the flame shot up feebly and flickered about she looked for something to keep alive the little bit of coal. She glanced at the heap in the corner which had become quiet, then, turning round, caught sight of the hat on the floor. She looked at it steadily for a minute between the flickers of the flame, then stooped down and picked it up. Carefully detaching the trimming from the hat, she laid it on the chair. Then she tore the bits of straw and lay them across each other over the little piece of coal. The fire blazed brightly for a few minutes after the straw had caught. It covered the room with a fierce light and the woman looked afraid that the sick man might be disturbed. But he was quiet as before. Almost mechanically she pulled a little piece of the burning straw from the fire and, shading it with her hand, stole softly to the other end of the room after depositing the child on the chair.

She looked for some minutes at the figure stretched before her. He lay with his face to the wall. He was a long thin man, and it seemed to her as she looked that his length was almost abnormal. Holding the light that was fast burning to the end away from her, she stooped down and laid her finger lightly

lightly on his forehead. The surface of his skin was cold as ice. She knew that he was dead. But she did not cry out. The eyes were filled with a look of bitter disappointment, and she dropped the bit of burning straw, and then, moving suddenly from her stooping posture, crushed out the little smouldering heap with her heel. She looked about the room for something; then repeating a prayer to herself hurriedly, hastened to the child who had woke up and was crying and kicking the bars of the wooden chair. There was something in the contrast between the stillness of the figure in the corner and the noise made by the child that made the woman shiver. She took up the child in her arms, comforted him, and sat down before the fire. She was thinking deeply. So poor! Scarcely enough to keep herself and the child till the end of the week, and then the figure in the corner! For some time she puzzled and puzzled. The burning straw had settled into a little glowing heap. She rose and went to a little box on the mantel-piece, and, opening it, counted the few coins in it. Then she seemed to reckon for a few moments, and a look of determination came into her face. She put the child down again and went to the other end of the room. She stood a moment over the prostrate figure, and then stooped down and took off an old rag of a shawl and a little child's coat which lay over the dead man's feet. She paused a moment. Again she stooped down and stripped the figure of all its coverings, until nothing was left but the dull white nightshirt that the man wore. She put the bundle which she had collected in a little heap on the other side of the room. Then she came back, and with an almost superhuman effort reared the figure into an upright position against the wall. She looked round for a moment, gathered up the little bundle, and stole softly from the room. A few hours later she came back. There was a gas lamp outside the window,  
and

and by the light of it she saw the child sitting at the feet of the figure, staring up at it stupidly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four days passed by, and still the figure stood against the wall. The woman had grown very white and haggard. She had only bought food enough for the child, and had scarce touched a morsel herself. It was Saturday. She was expecting a few pence for some matches which she had sold during the week. She was not allowed to take her money immediately, but had to hand it over to the owner of the matches, who had told her that if she had sold a certain quantity by the end of the week she should be paid a small percentage.

So she went out on this Saturday and managed to get rid of the requisite number, and carrying the money as usual to the owner, received a few pence commission. There was an eager look in her pale face as she hurried home and hastened to the box on the mantel-shelf. She emptied its contents into her hand, quickly counted up the total of her fortune, and then crept out again.

It was snowing heavily, but she did not mind. The soft flakes fell on her weary face, and she liked their warm touch. She hurried along until she came to a tiny grocer's shop. The red spot on her cheeks deepened as she asked the shopkeeper for twelve candles—"Tall ones, please," she said in a whisper. She pushed the money on to the counter and ran away home with her parcel. Then she went up to the figure against the wall, and gently placed it on the ground, away from the wall. She opened the parcel and carefully stood up the twelve candles in a little avenue, six each side of the dead man. With a feverous excitement in her eyes she pulled a match from her pocket and

lit

lit them. They burned steadily and brightly, casting a yellow light over the cold naked room, and over the blackened face of the dead man. The child that was rolling on the floor at the other end of the room uttered a coo of joy at the bright lights, and stretched out his tiny hands towards them. And the face of the mother was filled with a divine pleasure.

The articles of her faith had been fulfilled.